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LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY ISLAM

14

**NARRATIVES OF
ISLAMIC ORIGINS**

**THE BEGINNINGS OF
ISLAMIC HISTORICAL WRITING**

FRED M. DONNER

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For Elvira

PREFACE

THERE IS ALREADY an extensive scholarly literature on early Islamic historical writing. Much of this literature is very learned, but it always left me unsatisfied. It offered, to be sure, much factual information (and a lot of common-sense speculation) on the early development of historical writing among Muslims, but despite this, the outlines of this development never seemed to me to be sharply defined; even more important, the forces that drove this development remained murky and mysterious. After wrestling with the subject for several years, it finally dawned on me that the existing scholarship never asked *why* Muslims began to write history, but rather started from the assumption that even the earliest Believers had “naturally” wanted to write history, and proceeded to explain (largely on *a priori* grounds, since little evidence exists) how this evolution might first have begun in the early decades of the Islamic era. The more I thought about this assumption, however, the less I was inclined to agree with it, and the more I realized that making it blinds us to evidence that, I believe, suggests a somewhat different picture than that usually drawn.

This book therefore strives to answer two questions. 1) Why (and, therefore, when) did Muslims first decide or feel impelled to write history? 2) How did they proceed to elaborate their tradition of historical writing, once they had decided to undertake doing so? These two questions form the basis of the two parts of the book; Part I attempts to identify the intellectual context in which Muslims began to think and write historically, while Part II tries to sketch out the issues, themes, and (more briefly) forms of the early Islamic historiographical tradition. Addressing these two questions has also required that I devote serious consideration to the value of some radically revisionist interpretations of early Islam that have appeared over the past two decades—to the extent that doing so has become a third central agenda of the book.

I started research for this topic over fifteen years ago, and can only hope that readers will find the results worth the wait. (From my point of view, seeing it finally finished after so long is worthwhile almost regardless of the results.) The long delay was partly the result of the

usual complications of life and partly due to my own tendency to commit myself to too many things. But a more important cause of the delay was the fact that early versions of some opening chapters, drafted as long ago as 1982, lay idle on the shelf for years because I sensed—more subconsciously than consciously—that they were somehow not “right.” It was only many years later, around 1988, that I saw that I had approached the problem from the wrong angle, after which it became possible to make more rapid progress. I discarded the old chapters and pursued a completely new approach, one that resulted in the effort to place the rise of Islamic historiography in its intellectual context that constitutes Part I. I am sure, of course, that even this new approach is still not exactly, and in all ways, “right”—an army of eminent reviewers will doubtless remind me of just where it falls short—but at least I feel more comfortable with this approach to the genesis of Islamic historical writing.

Part II of this study attempts to lay out the main themes of early Islamic historical writing, following in many places the trail blazed by Albrecht Noth in his pioneering work *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen, und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung* (Bonn, 1973)—now available in a revised English translation (with Lawrence I. Conrad) as *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994). However, forcing any of the products of human creativity, such as the historical accounts treated here, into neat categories is at best an inexact science; sometimes, indeed, it is so much so, and so possibly misleading, that one questions whether the undertaking is worth the effort. Inevitably, the categories one chooses turn out to be fuzzy around the edges, or bleed into one another, or viewed in a different light can be seen to be in some ways variants of one another. I have tried to confront this problem head-on in various ways, particularly by introducing the concept of “hybridization” in Chapter 9, but frankly this seems to me to offer only an indifferent remedy to the problem. I can only hope that readers will keep in mind the taxonomic indeterminacy of much of life and human endeavor, and be charitable. It goes without saying that in a number of places my categorizations and those of Noth, the only other person who has attempted such a categorization, do not always tally. While some of this may be simply a matter of differing perceptions,

I think that Noth has based his categories (themes) more strictly on *formal* considerations, whereas my themes are defined mainly by the motivations or interests that, I believe, contributed to the articulation of each.

Over the long time that I have been working on this book, I have been assisted in various ways by many individuals and organizations. My most basic debt is to countless colleagues with whom, over the years, I discussed some aspect of the problem of early Islamic historical writing, and from whom I have learned much; I despair of recalling, at one time, all their names, and beg the forgiveness of those whom I unfairly slight by neglecting to mention them here, but wish to mention at least Lawrence I. Conrad (The Wellcome Institute, London), Patricia Crone (formerly Oxford and Cambridge, now at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton), Maribel Fierro (CSIC, Madrid), Gautier Juynboll (Leiden), Walter E. Kaegi (University of Chicago), Ella Landau-Tasseron (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem), Chase F. Robinson (Oxford University), Wadād al-Qāḍī (University of Chicago), Riḍwān al-Sayyid (Lebanese University), and Donald Whitcomb (University of Chicago). Inevitably, I learned of some recent publications too late to incorporate them in the present work; readers should note especially the valuable long review essay by Chase F. Robinson, "The Study of Islamic Historiography: a Progress Report," *JRAS* (1997), and the volume of essays edited by Hugh Kennedy, *Al-Ṭabarī: the Life and Works of a Medieval Muslim Historian* (Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming). I thank Dr. Robinson for sending me a copy of the proofs of the former.

I also owe a great debt to many colleagues, at the University of Chicago and elsewhere, who over the past several years have read drafts of various chapters or of the whole book and offered valuable suggestions for improvement, or who have listened to me talk about it and offered the encouragement that is often the decisive factor in whether a book is written or not. Among these I should like to give pride of place to a number of fine doctoral students (or former students) at the University of Chicago: Paul M. Cobb (now at Wake Forest University), Marion H. Katz (now at Mt. Holyoke College), Khaled Keshk, Kathryn M. Kueny (now at Lawrence University), Katherine H. Lang (now at University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire), Stuart D. Sears (now at

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I am especially grateful to the personnel at numerous libraries, who made available to me their valuable collections and did much to facilitate my research. These include especially the Yale University Library, the Library of the Institut Français d'Études Arabes de Damas, the University of Chicago Library, and the Research Archives of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, for use of their general collections, including microfilms of manuscripts found elsewhere. The Cambridge University Library supplied me with microfilms of manuscript works; the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, the Zāhiriya Library and the Asad Library in Damascus, and the Sülemaniye Kütüphanesi and Topkapı Saray in Istanbul all gave me access to important manuscript sources.

As long as this book has been in reaching completion, the task would have required even longer had it not been for the generosity of several institutions and individuals. The National Endowment for the Humanities, a United States Government Agency, awarded me a Fellowship for University Teachers in 1987–88 in order to work on it, for

which I am most grateful. The American Council of Learned Societies generously awarded me a travel grant that enabled me to attend the Oxford seminar on Ḥadīth and Historiography in September 1988. The University of Chicago's Humanities Institute awarded me a one-quarter fellowship to pursue reading on theories of narrative and how they might relate to Islamic historiography (Spring 1991). I also wish to thank Professor Philip Gossett, Dean of the Division of Humanities at the University of Chicago, and Professor Wadād al-Qāḍī, Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, for arranging a quarter free of teaching and committee work so that I could finish—or almost finish—drafting the text (Winter 1996). Barbara Hird has earned my thanks, and deserves the gratitude of all readers, for having prepared a very thorough index, and I am indebted to Dean Gossett and to Professor Gene B. Gragg, Director of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, for kindly agreeing to pay for it.

Finally, I am grateful above all to Elvira, Alex, and Lucy, who for many years put up with my preoccupation with this project, and the distraction from other important commitments that it caused. Despite the very long wait involved, they never once expressed any doubt that it would, eventually, come to fruition, and cheerfully offered their warmth and encouragement throughout.

Fred M. Donner
Chicago, May 1997

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Sources

The first half-century of Islamic history—from about 610 to about 660 CE—is both the most important and the most problematic period in that history. During these years, according to tradition, occurred the formative events in the life of the Islamic community. These include the preaching of Islam's Prophet, Muḥammad, and the creation under his leadership of the first community of Believers in Arabia; the rapid military expansion of that community throughout western Asia following Muḥammad's death; the emergence from the conquests of the first Islamic empire, under the leadership of the first caliphs; the codification of Islam's holy book, the Qur'ān; and the theological and political disputes by which Islam, as we now know it, began to define itself communally, doctrinally, and institutionally. Muslims of all eras have tended to see this era as a golden age, and to look back to the beliefs and actions of their spiritual forefathers from it for guidance in living their own lives and in formulating their own beliefs—whether they have been political leaders of the tenth century (or the twentieth) challenging the claims of their rivals for power in Islamic states, or religious scholars debating the pros and cons of customs duties or the use of tobacco. For want of a better designation, we will use the phrase “Islamic origins” to refer to this formative period.

An understanding of Islamic origins is important not only for Muslims, but also for all serious students of world history, if they wish to comprehend Islam and its development, even its development in later

historical periods. By the canons of modern historical research, however, it is exceedingly difficult to know much about Islamic origins, because the sources for it are highly problematic. Truly documentary sources for Islamic origins—that is, actual physical evidence contemporary with the origins of Islam, whether in the form of inscriptions, coins, archaeological evidence, or original papyrus or parchment—is almost non-existent. This being so, the generally received picture of Islamic origins has been constructed on the basis of chronicles and other written accounts produced by the Islamic tradition itself. But these, while extensive in scale, are literary sources¹ whose documentary value is the subject of intense disagreement: as we shall see in the coming pages, this uncertainty about the Islamic sources has gradually undermined historians' confidence in almost every aspect of the traditional view of Islamic origins. On the other hand, there do exist some sources roughly contemporary with the rise of Islam that were produced outside the Islamic tradition. Even though most of these extra-Islamic sources are also not truly documentary in nature, they have sometimes been assumed to provide more reliable information about Islamic origins than the Islamic sources, simply by virtue of their status as testimony independent of the Islamic tradition and its theological, political, and other points of view. Given the problematic nature of the traditional Islamic sources—in particular, the fact that they are not contemporary with Islamic origins—it is fair to say that responsible historians, whatever their attitude toward the Islamic sources, *must* take information from extra-Islamic sources into account.² Efforts to exploit these sources to illuminate Islamic origins, however, have not been particularly help-

¹By "literary" I mean not simply belles-lettres, but anything written down retrospectively or anything subjected to literary transmission, i.e. any written source other than a contemporary document. "Documentary" and "literary" are thus, in this usage, mutually exclusive categories.

²Perhaps the first serious attempt to exploit some of these sources for their historical content about Islamic origins was Kaegi's essay, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquests" (1969). The most ambitious attempt to synthesize a new picture of Islamic origins by using this material has been Crone and Cook's controversial work *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World* (1977). Curiously, Crone and Cook never cite Kaegi's article, although they relied heavily on the same sources. One of the more important of these sources has recently been re-examined with such questions in mind in Hoyland, "Sebeos, the Jews and the Rise of Islam."

ful, as I have tried to show elsewhere.³ For one thing, the majority of the non-Muslim sources that say the most about Islamic origins are neither contemporary with the events nor consistent in what they say. Moreover, they are relatively limited in number, and, like the Islamic sources, they were in most cases compiled under the pressure of religious and political forces whose impact on their presentation of events is still unclear.

As for those sources that are truly contemporary documents—consisting, for the most part, of archaeological and epigraphic information—they have been, and remain, exceedingly scarce, and most important events and figures in the story of Islamic origins (including the Prophet Muḥammad and the first four caliphs, for example) are completely “undocumented” in the strict sense of the term. It is noteworthy, however, that the little truly documentary evidence of this kind that has been available until recently has tended to fit reasonably well into the framework of traditional interpretations of Islamic origins, and have not required a dramatic re-thinking of the traditional view, at least in its externals. This situation may change with the full publication of new archaeological information now coming to light—but more often than not, the historical outlook of the interpreter determines his or her evaluation of the archaeological evidence, rather than vice-versa.⁴

This brings us back, then, to the copious literary sources in Arabic that purport, at least, to tell us much about this earliest phase of Islamic history. These include chronicles, poems, collections of *ḥadīths* (sayings) attributed to the Prophet or his Companions, epistles on theological issues, collections of *adab* (belles-lettres), and other materials,

³Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 142–46; *idem*, “The Origins of the Islamic State.”

⁴Two noteworthy examples are the interpretation of the orientation (*qibla*) of the prayer niche in early mosques, and of architectural remains from the seventh-century (CE) Negev. In the former case, Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 23–24, take early mosque *qiblas* as evidence for their revisionist claims, whereas King, “Astronomical Alignments,” views them in an entirely different manner in the context of various methods for establishing *qibla* orientation. In the latter instance, Nevo and Koren, “The Origins of the Muslim Descriptions of the Jāhili Meccan Sanctuary,” interpret certain architectural remains in the Negev as evidence for sweeping revisionist theories about Islamic origins, but their interpretation is challenged by Whitcomb, “Islam and the Socio-Cultural Transition of Palestine.”

in addition to the text of the Qur'ān itself. It is mainly on the testimony of these literary sources that the outlines of Islamic origins have been sketched, by both traditional Muslim and by modern scholars.

Yet, as any serious student of Islamic origins will know, these literary sources pose various problems as evidence for Islamic origins. First of all, there is the fact that they are not contemporary sources; sometimes they were written many centuries after the events they describe. It is obvious that reconstructing Islamic origins on the basis of such literary materials violates the first law of the historian, which is to use contemporary sources whenever possible. Nor is this merely a nicety of principle; even a quick reading of some of the main literary sources for Islamic origins—particularly narratives⁵ on this theme—reveals internal complexities that give pause to the serious researcher. Chronological discrepancies and absurdities abound, as do flat contradictions in the meaning of events or even, less frequently, on their

⁵In what follows I shall use “narrative sources” to refer specifically to those literary sources that offer what appear to be historical reports about some event. Narrative accounts thus belong to the broader category of literary sources, but are distinct from other literary sources, such as poems, etc. The division here is less clear-cut, however, because many poems, *adab* works, theological tracts, etc., while not adhering to a narrative structure, nonetheless convey considerable information that must be seen as belonging to an implicit narrative framework, to which they refer by allusion.

There is a vast theoretical literature on narrative, much of it quite recent. Although a good deal of this literature is peripheral to the concerns of this book with historical narration, I found the following works quite helpful, and my conceptualization of issues was doubtless shaped, consciously or unconsciously, by them: White, *The Content of the Form*; *idem*, *Tropics of Discourse*; several of the essays in Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative*; Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*; Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic*; Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History*; Dray, “On the Nature and Role of Narrative in History;” Mink, “Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument;” and the useful survey of perspectives in Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. The debate over the validity of narrative history—and indeed of any kind of history—raised by postmodernism is concisely discussed in Appleby, Hunt, and Jacobs’ excellent *Telling the Truth about History*, Chapter 6, “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Modernity,” 198–237, which offers a cogent rebuttal of the most radical claims of some postmodernist critics of history. I have taken Ellis’ demolition of the deconstructionist “program” in his brief and lively *Against Deconstruction* as sufficient justification for ignoring deconstruction in the present work.

fundamental course. Many accounts present information that seems clearly anachronistic; others provide ample evidence of embellishment or outright invention to serve the purposes of political or religious apologetic.

Approaches to the Sources

Varying perceptions of the gravity of these problems in the literary sources have led modern scholarship on early Islamic history to treat the raw material provided by these literary and narrative sources in a variety of ways. At least four distinct approaches can be discerned, each of them based on somewhat different historiographical assumptions. To some extent, these four approaches emerged as successive stages in the development of Western scholarship on early Islam, each approach growing out of (or out of the perceived limitations of) one of its predecessors. Yet, we cannot envision these different approaches as stages in the sense that an old one is transformed into and supplanted by a new one, as a chrysalis is replaced by a butterfly. Rather, the various approaches have coexisted; different historians from the same era have sometimes preferred different approaches, and one and the same historian may even adopt different aspects of several approaches in various aspects of his or her work. Each approach to understanding Islamic origins is thus in some sense a competitor for the allegiance of practicing historians, who have had to decide which approach they find most intellectually viable.

The first approach taken by Western scholarship on early Islamic history was simply to accept, in the main, the traditional picture of Islamic origins presented by the Muslim sources. We may call this essentially positivistic outlook the **DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH**. Although from the present vantage point this approach may seem hardly to merit consideration as a critical approach to history, we must remember that in its insistence on using Muslim sources to reconstruct Islamic history it represented a decisive advance in historical method over the kind of anti-Islamic polemic that had dominated Western writing about Islam from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century, and which had generally shown no interest in examining what Muslim sources said.⁶ The

⁶For an overview of medieval and early modern Western anti-Islamic polemic, see the classic studies by Daniel, *Islam and the West*, and Southern, *Western Views of*

descriptive approach was founded upon three main assumptions about the sources. The first was that the text of the Qur'ān had virtually documentary value for the life and teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad. The second was that the copious reports (*akhbār*) making up the narratives about Islamic origins found in Muslim chronicles were basically reliable for reconstructing "what actually happened." The third assumption was that the many *ḥadīths* attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad were a religious literature quite distinct from the historical *akhbār* offered by the chronicles, and hence were not directly relevant to the task of reconstructing early Islamic history. (In this respect this approach parts company decisively with traditional Muslim scholarship, which views the *ḥadīths* as historical evidence having a validity equal or superior to that of the chronicle narratives.) The scholarship of this phase tended, then, to replicate in one or another Western language the main outlines of the Muslim narrative accounts, while for the most part neglecting the study of *ḥadīth*, which was deemed of interest only for the study of Muslim piety.⁷ It dominated Western historical scholarship on Islam—indeed, had the field to itself—from its inception in the seventeenth century until at least the middle of the nineteenth century.⁸ In the West, this first approach to early Islam was already well in place by the time of Gibbon, who in Chapters 50–52 of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–82) included a detailed description of the rise of Islam, based squarely on translations of a number of relatively

Islam in the Middle Ages, as well as several essays in Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*.

⁷Early studies of *ḥadīth*, such as Sprenger, "Über das Traditionswesen bei den Arabern" (1856), and Salisbury, "Contributions from Original Sources to our Knowledge of the Science of Muslim Tradition" (1862), provided informative surveys of the Muslim science of *ḥadīth*, but little comment on the question of Islamic origins. Sprenger's article "On the Origin and Progress of Writing Down of Historical Facts among the Musalmans" (1856) grappled with the reliability of accounts about Muḥammad, but treated the "historical" accounts as essentially separate from *ḥadīth*.

⁸For a brief sketch of the gradual emergence of Western academic scholarship on Islamic origins from the realm of crass polemic, see Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 294–301.

late Arabic sources, such as al-Makīn (d. 672/1273),⁹ Bar Hebraeus (d. 685/1286),¹⁰ and Abū l-Fidā' (d. 732/1331).¹¹

The allure of the descriptive approach is considerable, because the narratives of Islamic origins themselves seem quite plausible, at least until one analyzes them rigorously. Part of this allure is also due to the fact that the traditional view of Islamic origins became so familiar, at least in scholarly circles, from long exposure to the Islamic sources. For this reason, the descriptive approach has survived right up to the present, particularly in texts intended for general readers,¹² where rigorous discussion of sources is not to be expected, although assimilating the results of such source criticism might be considered necessary. At any rate, the overwhelming majority of surveys of Islamic history have sketched the story of Islamic origins along lines remarkably similar to those laid down in the traditional Islamic sources. This is true not only of such older works as William Muir's studies of *The Life of Mahomet* (first ed., 1858–61) and *The Caliphate, its Rise, Decline, and Fall* (second ed., 1892), or Philip K. Hitti's highly successful *History of the Arabs* (first ed., 1937),¹³ successive editions of which served for decades as the standard general work in the field in English (and, in translation, in dozens of other languages); it even applies to such recent works as Claude Cahen's *Der Islam, I: Vom Ursprung bis zu den Anfängen des Osmanenreiches* (1968), G.E. von Grunebaum's *Classical Islam* (1970), M.A. Shaban's *Islamic History, AD 600–750 (AH 132): a New Interpretation* (1971), M.G.S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam* (1974), Hugh Kennedy's *Muhammad and the Age of the Caliphates* (1986), Ira Lapidus' *A History of Islamic Societies* (1988), and Albert Hourani's *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991), to mention but a few. As different as these works are from one another in their assumptions

⁹ *Historia Saracenicæ* (1625).

¹⁰ *Historia orientalis* (1663).

¹¹ *Annales Moslemiques* (1754). Gibbon also relied heavily on the historical syntheses and translated excerpts of early Arabists such as the *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697) of Barthélemy d'Herbelot (1625–95) and *The History of the Saracens* (1708–18) of Simon Ockley (1672–1720).

¹² This fact is noted by Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 13, where most modern scholarship on Islamic origins is tartly described as "Muslim chronicles in modern languages and graced with modern titles."

¹³ On Hitti see Donner, "Philip K. Hitti."

and overall approach to Islamic history, they all sketch the story of Islamic origins along lines that can be firmly traced back to the picture provided by the Islamic narratives themselves.

This comfortable replication of the Islamic tradition's own view of Islamic origins would be perfectly acceptable if it could withstand critical scrutiny. But serious students of Islamic origins began to challenge it over a century ago, as they became familiar with a wider range of narrative sources, particularly with those produced by some of the earlier historical writers of the Islamic tradition. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, manuscripts of a number of important early Arabic sources first became known to Western scholars.¹⁴ The arrival of printing in the Arab world in the late nineteenth century provided an important stimulus to the historical exploration of Islamic origins as Arab scholars began to publish the texts of important sources hitherto available only in manuscript, and hence not widely available for study.¹⁵ Western scholars, too, began to search for new texts and to collate, catalog, and edit those texts they deemed of special value for early Islamic history.¹⁶ A series of massive editorial projects resulted in fairly sound editions, based on the then-known manuscripts, of such works as the *Sīra* (biography of the Prophet Muḥammad) of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), the *Ṭabaqāt* (a biographical dictionary) of Muḥammad ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), the *Futūḥ al-buldān* (narratives of the Islamic conquests) by al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), a collection of important Arabic geographical works, the massive *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (a "universal" chronicle) of Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), and many more.

¹⁴The degree to which pioneering Western scholars of only a century ago were forced to rely on manuscripts, rather than on printed or lithographed editions of Arabic texts, can be glimpsed by looking at the footnotes in Goldziher's *Muhammedanische Studien*; trans. Stern and Barber as *Muslim Studies*. On this work, see below, 13.

¹⁵The Būlāq editions of major texts such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* were especially noteworthy.

¹⁶Some milestones in the cataloging effort were Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Die Geschichtsschreiber der Araber und ihre Werke* (1882); Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (1892–1902; second ed., 1943–49); Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (1967–proceeding), in addition to the catalogs of manuscripts of hundreds of libraries, from Paris to Patna.

As a result of efforts such as these, Western scholars found themselves confronted with an embarrassment of riches in source material. Far from clarifying the historical development of early Islam, however, this wealth of new material produced a gathering awareness of unsuspected complexities in the sources that raised doubts about the veracity of the traditional picture of early Islam. Particularly troubling in this respect were numerous instances of glaring contradictions among different sources, or of logical and chronological absurdity, implausibility, or patent sectarian or political bias. This new perception of the complexity—and, perhaps, the unreliability—of the Islamic narratives, which the descriptive approach was woefully inadequate to explain, was instrumental in generating another approach to early Islamic history.

This second approach adopted by some Western scholars can be termed the SOURCE-CRITICAL APPROACH. Beginning roughly in the middle of the nineteenth century, some Western students of early Islam, motivated by the positivist school of European historiography, attempted to resolve or explain away the patent contradictions and logical absurdities in the sources through careful comparative source criticism. Because the source problems had first been noted in narrative accounts, most of the effort of the source-critical approach was directed at developing ways to explain the existence of divergent accounts, and to identify which of several divergent accounts should be deemed most trustworthy. The assumptions underlying this approach were therefore the following. First, it was assumed that the extant narrative sources included much accurate early historical material, but that this reliable material was intermixed with unreliable material (also of early date). This unreliable material was either a) once-reliable accounts that had become distorted through inaccurate transmission from one historian to another, resulting in chronological misplacement, garbling or corruption of key words and phrases, loss of original context, etc.; or b) tendentious or popular material originally written not by early Muslim historians, but by “storytellers,” or by purveyors of “historical novels” or polemics motivated by tribal or other bias, etc; or c) later polemic or dogma interpolated by later transmitters and editors into the context of older historical material. In any case, it was assumed that the sources on which extant narratives were based were written sources. A second assumption was that non-Muslim sources

(particularly Christian sources in Syriac and Greek) provided an independent source of evidence against which one could compare particular accounts in the Muslim narratives, to see whether they were reliable or unreliable. The third and fourth assumptions of the source-critical approach were shared with the descriptive approach. They were the belief that the *ḥadīth* material was of marginal importance to the reconstruction of Islamic history because of its essentially non-historical, religious concerns, and the quasi-documentary character of the Qur'ānic text.

Early advocates of this approach wrote some penetrating studies that have remained of value, even a century later. Perhaps the first of importance was M.J. de Goeje's *Mémoire sur la conquête de la Syrie* (first ed., 1864). Relying especially on a newly identified source, al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-buldān*, of which he also prepared a critical edition, de Goeje reconstructed the history of the Islamic conquests in Syria in a way that touted the reliability of the Medinese historians Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767 or 151) and al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823), particularly because their chronology was corroborated by the Syriac and Greek sources, and dismissed as less reliable the narrations of the Kūfan Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. ca. 185/801?). Further major studies along these lines were Julius Wellhausen's *Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams* (1899) and *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (1902). Working especially with al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*, the critical edition of which had just appeared, Wellhausen made an even more careful study of the narratives transmitted by Sayf, one of al-Ṭabarī's main sources for the conquests, and also concluded that they were unreliable, particularly when compared with the Medinese historians Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī. Wellhausen saw various narrators as representatives of "historical schools" active in some of the main centers of the early Islamic empire, notably Medina, al-Kūfa, al-Baṣra, Syria, and Khurāsān.¹⁷ Wellhausen saw the "school" of Medina as generally more trustworthy than the "Iraqi school," to which Sayf belonged, both because in his view they relied on more accurate informants, and because he considered them methodologically more careful.¹⁸ Other schools were largely lost—particularly

¹⁷*Das arabische Reich*, Preface.

¹⁸As with de Goeje, the corroboration of the Medina school's chronology for events in Syria by non-Muslim sources, compared with the apparent absurdity of Sayf's chronology, was instrumental in leading Wellhausen to his conclusions. The

the Syrian school, which had been favorable to the Umayyad dynasty but was largely expunged or dropped from narrative compilations following the 'Abbāsids' overthrow of the Umayyads—but some stray accounts could be gleaned in various compilations.

By distinguishing “good” from “bad” sources in this way, de Goeje and especially Wellhausen established criteria on which they based their own fairly comprehensive syntheses of early Islamic history, particularly on the *ridḍa* wars, the early Islamic conquests, the First Civil War, and the history of the Umayyads;¹⁹ both refrained, however, from tackling directly the life of the Prophet Muḥammad,²⁰ perhaps because of uncertainty over how to use the *ḥadīth* material. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the Russian scholar Miednikov published an analysis of the Arabic sources for the history of Palestine between the Islamic conquest and the Crusades, accompanied by extensive translations into Russian of the main sources.²¹

Iraqi scholar Murtaḍā al-ʿAskarī carried Wellhausen's view even further, arguing in his book *Khamsūn wa-mi'a ṣaḥābī mukhtalaq* (“One Hundred Fifty Invented Companions”) that Sayf was a *zindīq* (atheist) intent on corrupting the historical traditions of the Islamic community by inventing many spurious “companions” of the Prophet as authorities for his fabricated stories. Although he does not say so, the implication is that, once Sayf's material is purged from the corpus, much of the rest derives from “good” sources. Another source-critical review more favorable to Sayf is Hinds, “Sayf b. ʿUmar's Sources on Arabia.”

¹⁹Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*; *idem*, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam* (1901); *idem*, *Das arabische Reich*.

²⁰Although he eschewed attempting a full synthesis of Muḥammad's life, Wellhausen did make important preliminary contributions in his essays in “Muhammeds Gemeindeordnung von Medina” and “Seine Schreiben und die Gesandtschaften an ihn,” and by making a German abridgment of another important source, entitled *Muhammad in Medina, das ist Vakidi's Kitab alMaghazi in verkürzter deutscher Wiedergabe herausgegeben* (1882). Moreover, he contributed important studies of the pre-Islamic environment in which Muḥammad appeared, particularly his *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (2nd ed., 1897) and “Medina vor dem Islam.” On Wellhausen, see Rudolph, “Wellhausen as an Arabist.”

²¹Nikolai Aleksandrovich Miednikov, *Palestina ot zavoevanija ee arabami do krestovyz pozodob po arabskim istochnikam* [“Palestine from the Arab Conquest to the Crusades, According to Arabic Sources”] (1897–1902). Vol. 1 offered evaluations of Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Saʿd, al-Maqdisī, and other compilers; vol. 2 (in 3 parts), Russian translations of the passages of their works relevant to Palestine.

Whereas Wellhausen and de Goeje had concentrated mainly on separating "good" historical schools from "bad" ones, Leone Caetani seems to have been especially interested in detecting the misplacement of originally valid accounts and in clarifying the attendant chronological or geographical confusion. He undertook this by compiling his massive *Annali dell'Islam* (1905–26), in which he gave a detailed summary in Italian of each of the historical accounts available to him for the first forty years of the Islamic era, along with numerous (sometimes extended) essays of a critical or synthetic nature on early Islamic history and the sources for it.²²

In addition to these efforts, by which the source critics tried to resolve anomalies and contradictions in the early sources, they also grappled with the problem of later interpolation, whether as a result of sectarian or political polemic²³ or of retouching under the pressure of later dogma (such as the idealization of the Companions of the Prophet).²⁴ Wellhausen, Caetani, and many others commented extensively on this phenomenon in their works.

The source-critical approach contributed some sound insights that continue to be of value; in particular, the role of later interpolation for dogmatic or political reasons, the misplacement of individual accounts, and the question of the interdependence of different written sources were greatly clarified by this approach, which marked a distinct advance over the descriptive approach.²⁵ But it is most useful when applied to cases in which we can safely assume that we are dealing with texts transmitted in written form; this we know to have been overwhelmingly the case from the third century AH onwards. In recent

²²His less well-known but very useful *Chronographia Islamica* (5 vols. in 3, 1912–23) was a more concise counterpart to the *Annali* covering the period from the Prophet to 132/750; it was originally intended to extend to AH 922/1517 CE, but was never completed.

²³E.g. the early essay on this theme by Nöldeke, "Zur Tendenziösen Gestaltung der Urgeschichte des Islam's" (1898); more recently, A.J. Cameron, *Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī*.

²⁴E.g. Friedlaender, "Muhammedanische Geschichtskonstruktionen." The essay "Ta'rikh," *EI* ¹ *Supplement* (H.A.R. Gibb) offers a concise overview of early Islamic historiography from a source-critical perspective; see also Richter, "Medieval Arabic Historiography."

²⁵The misplacement of accounts is treated below, 260–61.

years, Fuat Sezgin has developed the source-critics' assumption that extant texts are based on a transmission (albeit sometimes abridged, garbled, or confused) of earlier *written* sources, and has called for the reconstruction, at least in part, of the lost works of earlier authors—including some dating to the first century AH—by collecting the citations attributed to them found in extant later works.²⁶ For the earliest period of Islamic historical writing (first–second centuries AH), however, it now seems clear, on the basis of numerous case studies, that material was often, if not usually, transmitted orally or in only partially stabilized written form.²⁷ Particularly for the study of Islamic origins, then, which must deal with precisely these early sources, the insights of the source-critical approach are useful only when tempered by a lively awareness of the fluid nature of oral transmission.

An awareness of the complexities of oral tradition is distinctive of the third approach to the sources of early Islamic history, which we can term the TRADITION-CRITICAL APPROACH. It was inaugurated by the publication in 1890 of Ignaz Goldziher's epochal study of *ḥadīth*.²⁸ This work was the first by a Western scholar to view the *ḥadīth* in the context of conflicting political, religious, and social interests in the Islamic community during its first several centuries, and thus to see it as of central importance to an understanding of the whole of early Islamic civilization.²⁹ Goldziher demonstrated convincingly that many of the *ḥadīths*, far from being authentic sayings of the Prophet, could only be understood as reflections of those later interests, despite the fact that each *ḥadīth* was equipped with an *isnād* or chain of informants who were supposedly the ones through whom the saying had been handed

²⁶GAS, I, 53–84. Recently, several attempts have been made to reconstruct lost works or parts thereof on this basis. See particularly al-A'zamī, *Maghāzī rasūl Allāh*, and Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*. On this procedure, which often neglects to take into account the existence of various redactions of the "original" text, see the critique of the latter work by Conrad, "Recovering Lost Texts," and the review by Jarrar in *Al-Qanṭara* 13 (1992), 287–90.

²⁷See below, 16–18, for a fuller discussion of the question of oral vs. written transmission.

²⁸This is found in his *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 3–251 (= *Muslim Studies*, II, 15–274).

²⁹For some early Western studies of *ḥadīth*, see the articles by Sprenger and Salisbury cited above, 6 n. 7.

down from the Prophet to later generations of *ḥadīth* collectors. The mere allegation that some *ḥadīths* were later fabrications was not necessarily of much note, inasmuch as Muslim scholars had for centuries themselves recognized the problem of fabricated *ḥadīths*, and had developed sophisticated methods of evaluating the *isnāds* in order to classify *ḥadīths* into categories of “sound” or authentic sayings of the Prophet as opposed to “weak” or fabricated ones.³⁰ What made Goldziher’s researches particularly significant was the fact that he had relied for his evidence solely on the collections of supposedly sound *ḥadīths*, many of which he showed to be later forgeries; by so doing, he called into question the reliability of the whole corpus of *ḥadīths* and, the authenticity of *isnāds* as records of a *ḥadīth*’s origins and transmission, not to mention the methods traditionally employed by Muslim scholars to evaluate their reliability.

Goldziher’s work, dealing as it did mainly with *ḥadīths* or Prophetic sayings, had a more direct and immediate impact on the study of the development of Islamic law and theology than it did on the study of early Islamic history or historical writing. This was because it was known that the Prophetic *ḥadīths*, unlike the historical *akhbār*, had served as the main source of precedents in matters of Islamic law. Hence it was felt that the *ḥadīth* literature and the Islamic narrative or historical accounts somehow represented two separate realms, so that the implications of Goldziher’s work in the former was not necessarily decisive for the latter. Indeed, even Goldziher himself, despite his keen sense for the development of Islamic legal traditions and for Islamic theology, and notwithstanding his deep skepticism regarding the transmission of *ḥadīths*, remained quite positive on the reliability of the Islamic historiographical tradition. The Muslim historians of the ‘Abbāsīd period, he wrote:

were conscientious in enumerating and relating the detailed facts....At the first period of this [historical] literature it was with utmost precision that they referred to their sources. They [i.e. those sources] were mostly people still alive at that time whose knowledge of the fact reached back to one

³⁰For an introduction to this traditional Muslim *isnād* criticism, see *EI* ², “Ḥadīth,” and “Al-Djarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl” (J. Robson).

or more eye-witnesses through the chain of mediating narrators. . . . Thus it happened, as can be seen even in aṭ-Ṭabarī, that the same event was narrated in various versions. . . . By these means we are put in possession of such critically available material as is suitable in every respect to the positive reconstruction of the history of Islam.³¹

This is, of course, an attitude akin to Wellhausen's; Goldziher can thus be said to have embraced a source-critical approach to historical sources, even as he pioneered a tradition-critical attitude toward the *ḥadīth* literature.

Since Goldziher's day, several other scholars have emphasized the tradition-critical side of his work, that is, the notion that the accounts available to us today represent the culmination of a long process of evolution, and have extended it from the *ḥadīth* literature to historical accounts. Their work thus represents a rejection of the "documentary hypothesis" of the strictly source-critical approach; they argue, following Goldziher's lead, that the tradition evolved over time (and, in part at least, orally) and naturally shows the impact of political, theological, social, and other issues that were important not at the time of the event the accounts are supposedly describing (e.g. the life of the Prophet), but only at some time during the long period when the tradition was being transmitted, first orally and later in increasingly rigid written form. Some individual accounts may indeed go back to the earliest times; others in the mass of tradition may be completely fabricated at a much later date. Adherents of this approach thus readily admit that a sizable proportion of the tradition about Islamic origins may, from the historical point of view, be spurious. But they also make the assumption that there does exist a "kernel of historical fact" lodged deep inside the hull of accumulated traditional material. Hence careful analysis of divergent versions of the same account can, they feel, allow them

³¹ "Historiography in Arabic Literature," in Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, 391–92. Much the same viewpoint was held by Goldziher's contemporary Snouck Hurgronje; a convenient selection of his works (originally published between 1880 and 1925), and translated (when necessary) into English or French, is provided in Bousquet and Schacht, eds., *Selected Works of C. Snouck Hurgronje*; note esp. 7–35, where Snouck Hurgronje offers his brief reconstruction of Islamic origins.

in many cases to uncover the original—or at least the earliest—extant form of a given set of accounts, not infrequently with the result that some historical facts about the earliest days of the Islamic community can be recovered.

This approach, which relies heavily on insights regarding form criticism and tradition criticism developed in Old Testament and New Testament studies, has over the years been championed by numerous scholars, including Geo Widengren and Harris Birkeland, Rudolf Sellheim, M.J. Kister, and, with the most explicit theoretical justification, Albrecht Noth.³² Significant debate arose over the question of how long material was transmitted orally, and when it became fixed in written form. While the existence of some written materials at an early date has long been assumed,³³ it is not clear how early stable collections of written text—books—can be said to have existed. The main proponent of the early existence of set “books” has been Fuat Sezgin, who first made his position clear in 1956 in a study of *ḥadīth*;³⁴ there he argued that, by sorting materials from later collections of *ḥadīths* according to the transmitters in their *isnāds*, we could reconstruct earlier, lost *ḥadīth* books. He is convinced that books with fixed content were already being compiled in the first century AH, a view that has been one of the operative assumptions on which Sezgin has based his massive *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*. His view that books such as *sīra* compilations were already fixed by the end of the first century AH was shared by Nabia Abbott, who came to similar conclusions partly on faith, and partly on the basis of extensive research in early Arabic

³²Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension* (1955); *idem*, “Oral Tradition and Written Literature among the Hebrews in the Light of Arabic Evidence, with Special Regard to Prose Narratives” (1959); Harris Birkeland, *The Lord Guideth: Studies on Primitive Islam* (1956); *idem*, *Muslim Interpretation of Surah 107* (1958); *idem*, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran* (1955); *idem*, *The Legend of the Opening of Muhammed’s Breast* (1955). For works by Sellheim, Kister, and Noth, see below, 17–19.

³³The use of writing to record Arabic poetry and prose at an early date was demonstrated already by Goldziher, “Der Dīwān des Ġarwāl b. Aus al-Ḥuṭej’a” I (1892), and Krenkow, “The Use of Writing for the Preservation of Ancient Arabic Poetry” (1922).

³⁴Sezgin, *Buhārī’nin kaynakları* (1956), Preface. A more accessible statement of his position is found in his *GAS*, I, 53–84.

papyri.³⁵ The contrary point of view has been argued most consistently by Sezgin's Frankfurt colleague Rudolf Sellheim, who believes that the texts of early compilations remained fluid under conditions of largely or partially oral transmission until the third and even the fourth century AH.³⁶ The debate may have been laid to rest by the work of Gregor Schoeler, who argues convincingly that the material in question was often conveyed from teacher to student through lectures (for which the lecturer may have relied on written notes), meaning that both oral and written transmission were often involved.³⁷ Schoeler's general position, straddling the strict oral and written transmission positions, had been advanced by others, but without Schoeler's extensive base of evidence—for example, by Widengren, who while embracing tradition criticism (orality) warned against overstressing the oral character of the early Islamic narratives.³⁸ More recently, Harald Motzki's analysis of early Meccan tradition has demonstrated convincingly that both oral and written transmission were employed as early as the first century AH.³⁹

The realization that the narratives of Islamic origins may have undergone a long period of oral or partly oral transmission implicitly undermined the relatively simple method that Wellhausen and other source-critics had developed as the basis for evaluating historical accounts; and this, of course, cast doubt on the reconstruction of early

³⁵Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I: *Historical Texts*, 26.

³⁶Sellheim, "Muhammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis;" *idem*, "Abū 'Alī al-Qālī." Further worrisome observations are found in Leder, "Authorship and Transmission in Unauthored Literature;" Muranyi, "Ibn Ishāq's *Kitāb al-Magāzī* in der *Riwāya* von Yūnus b. Bukair."

³⁷Schoeler, "Die Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im frühen Islam;" *idem*, "Weiteres zur Frage der schriftlichen oder mündlichen Überlieferung der Wissenschaften im Islam;" *idem*, "Mündliche Thora und Ḥadīṭ: Überlieferung, Schreibverbot, Redaktion;" *idem*, "Schreiben und Veröffentlichen. Zu Verwendung und Funktion der Schrift in den ersten islamischen Jahrhunderten."

³⁸Widengren, "Oral Tradition and Written Literature." See also the comments of Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, 131, and the early study of Sprenger, "On the Origin and Progress of Writing Down Historical Facts among the Musalmans," cited above, 6 n. 7.

³⁹Harald Motzki, *Die Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, esp. 87–92. Motzki provides a summary of his method in "The Muṣannaf of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī."

Islamic history created by Wellhausen and others adopting the source-critical approach. Still, even Sellheim, a leading proponent of "orality," believes in the existence of a "kernel" of historical fact residing within the traditionally conveyed material. In his view, "we have a greater mass of biographical reports about Muḥammad than we have about any other founder of a great oriental religion. Not a few of these [reports] may well correspond to an actual event in their kernel, their basic tendency, or at least come close to [an actual event]." ⁴⁰

The studies of Albrecht Noth offered a much more direct critique of the weaknesses of the source-critical approach. ⁴¹ Noth rejected Wellhausen's vision of distinct local historiographical "schools," identified with various localities—especially Medina and al-Kūfa—which had been the key criterion by which Wellhausen and his followers evaluated accounts. Pointing out that all these "schools" employed the same methods, and that all combined in their narrations older materials representing widely divergent points of view, Noth argued that we cannot evaluate an account as more or less reliable merely by determining to which "school" it belonged. This made evaluation of individual accounts a much more complicated process demanding that the analyst attempt to see the account in the context of all related accounts on the same subject, so as to understand its place in the evolution of the tradition (partly in oral form) on that subject. But these scholars still contend that there was a valid "historical kernel" within the traditional material, even if isolating it from the masses of accretions was now a more difficult task.

Perhaps the most consistent practitioners of this approach for the purposes of historical reconstruction, particularly of the life of the Prophet, have been M.J. Kister and a circle of scholars working near him in Jerusalem; ⁴² since the 1980s, a number of scholars in other lands

⁴⁰Sellheim, "Muhammeds erstes Offenbarungserlebnis," 3. See especially his "Prophet, Chalif, und Geschichte," which analyzes traditions about the Prophet into three broad layers, of which the "Grundschrift" constitutes the early, reliable, historical kernel.

⁴¹Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*; Noth/Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*. See also Noth, "Der Charakter der ersten großen Sammlungen," *idem*, "Iṣfāhān-Nihāwand," *idem*, "Futūḥ-History and Futūḥ-Historiography."

⁴²Kister has provided no general methodological rationale for his approach. A selection of his earlier articles, which typify his approach, can be found in his *Studies*

seem to have embraced much the same approach.⁴³ Traditions about key personalities in the First Civil War have been analyzed by E.L. Petersen.⁴⁴

In some cases, however, the application of source-critical and tradition-critical methods to reports about Islamic origins seemed to reduce the "historical kernel" to the vanishing point.⁴⁵ So, while many scholars continued to embrace Goldziher's sanguine attitude regarding the "kernel of historical fact" contained in traditional accounts, others were less sure, and sensed that Goldziher may have raised a completely new set of problems by calling into question the reliability of the *isnād* as a warrant for an account's transmission. As J.W. Hirschberg observed in 1939:

[Scholars] must admit that since that time (i.e. of Goldziher in the 1890s—FD) Arabic studies have not succeeded in establishing generally recognized methodologies and criteria for distinguishing the material that rests on firm and objective foundations. Otherwise we could not explain the polar opposites [in interpretation] and contradictory evaluations that we encounter.⁴⁶

It was pointed out that *isnāds* were found not only in *ḥadīths*, but also in many historical accounts, and that it had been on the basis of such *isnāds* that source-critics like de Goeje and Wellhausen had relied to identify their different historiographical "schools." If some *ḥadīths* could be shown by various means to be not words of the Prophet but inventions of the second, or third, or fourth centuries AH, despite an apparently flawless chain of transmitters, how could we be sure that other

in *Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*. See also essays by the next generation of Israeli scholars; e.g. Rubin, "Muḥammad's Curse of Muḍar;" Landau-Tasseron, "Processes of Redaction;" Lecker, "Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān and 'Ammār b. Yāsir, Jewish Converts to Islam."

⁴³E.g. Busse, "'Omar's Image as Conqueror of Jerusalem;" Juynboll, "Development of *Sunna* as a Technical Term."

⁴⁴Petersen, *Alī and Mu'āwiya in Early Arabic Tradition*.

⁴⁵An example is the study of Conrad, "The Conquest of Arwād."

⁴⁶Hirschberg, *Jüdische und Christliche Lehren im vor- und frühislamischen Arabien*, 3.

ḥadīths were not also forgeries which had simply escaped detection? And if forgeries were rife among even the most apparently trustworthy *ḥadīths*, how could we be sure that other kinds of accounts, including apparently early historical ones relying on similar chains of authorities for their warrant of authenticity, were not also merely later fabrications made for political, religious, or other ends?

This view, which we may designate the SKEPTICAL APPROACH,⁴⁷ thus also represents in some sense an outgrowth of Goldziher's work, but one that emphasizes a different aspect of it than that underpinning the approach of the tradition-critics. Like the tradition-critics, the skeptics accept the notion that the traditions about Islamic origins are the products of long and partly oral evolution, but unlike the tradition-critics they deny that there is any recoverable kernel of historical fact that might tell us "what actually happened" in the early Islamic period. Rather, according to the skeptical view, whatever tidbit of historical fact the traditions may once have contained has either been redacted out of existence, or is so completely buried in a matrix of later accretions as to be impossible to isolate. In the words of the most articulate of the recent wave of skeptical writers, "[w]hether one approaches Islamic historiography from the angle of the religious or the tribal tradition, its overall character thus remains the same: the bulk of it is debris of an obliterated past."⁴⁸

A precursor of such a radically skeptical position can be found in the works of the Jesuit scholar Henri Lammens who, around the beginning of the twentieth century, published a series of detailed studies of the background and rise of early Islam.⁴⁹ These were marked by a (largely implicit) set of source-critical assumptions. Foremost among them was his conviction that the *sīra* material (the traditional biog-

⁴⁷All competent historians must be skeptical of their sources, of course, in the sense that they must test the sources' authenticity. I apply the rubric "skeptical" to this group of scholars not because they are the only ones to approach the sources critically—both the source-critics and the tradition-critics also do this—but because they exhibit a radical skepticism toward the whole received picture of Islamic origins.

⁴⁸Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 10.

⁴⁹See especially *Fatima et les filles de Mahomet* (1912); also *Études sur le siècle des Omayyades* (1930). On Lammens (1862–1937) himself, see Salibi, "Islam and Syria in the Writings of Henri Lammens."

raphy of the Prophet Muḥammad) was not an independent collection of recollections of the Prophet's life, but rather represented an outgrowth of earlier works of Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*) and *ḥadīth*, or sayings attributed to the Prophet (most of the latter of which were false, in Lammens' view). He also pointed out that Medinese traditions about the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, portrayed the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima in a bad light, partly in reaction to the exaggerated honor paid to her by traditions of the Kūfan school. The latter advanced the political and religious claims of Fāṭima's husband 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's nephew. Lammens' work sometimes inspired admiration for its erudition (which is, at times, astonishing), but its thinly veiled hostility to Islam was offensive to Muslims and to fair-minded Western scholars alike, and found no real following; moreover, his methodological assumptions were challenged by some of his contemporaries, notably Theodor Nöldeke and Carl Heinrich Becker.⁵⁰ Becker faulted Lammens for accepting uncritically any accounts that were hostile to Fāṭima, suggesting that Lammens' bias stemmed from his desire, as a committed Christian, to discredit the whole family of the Prophet. Although Becker agreed with Lammens that the *sīra* had been pieced together from materials related to *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*, he saw the relationship in different terms than had Lammens, arguing that both *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* themselves contained diverse material, including—along with legends and fraudulent accounts rooted in political and religious debates—many valid historical recollections that had been passed down among the early Muslims. In Becker's view, then, it was not defensible simply to reject the picture drawn in the *sīra*, as Lammens wished to do, because in his opinion it contained a saving remnant of sound historical material; the challenge was to distinguish the sound material from those accounts that were merely pious legend or political propaganda of some era or other. Becker thus showed his allegiance to a form of what we have termed the tradition-critical approach.

⁵⁰Becker, "Prinzipielles zu Lammens' *Sīrastudien*," reprinted as "Grundsätzliches zur Leben-Muhammadforschung" in his *Islamstudien*, I, 520–27; Nöldeke, "Die Tradition über das Leben Muhammads" (who also criticizes what he sees as Caetani's exaggerated skepticism).

Perhaps the first to articulate the skeptical position explicitly was Joseph Schacht, who applied it in his studies of Islamic law,⁵¹ but, unlike Lammens, Schacht refrained from following up its implications for the question of Islam's origins, concentrating instead on trying to understand how Islamic law had evolved during the first four centuries AH.⁵² An important early contribution with more direct implications for the study of the history of Islamic origins was provided by Robert Brunschvig in a study of supposedly historical traditions about the early Islamic conquest of North Africa; Brunschvig showed that these accounts were not early, reliable reports of the events of the conquest itself, but rather reflections of later disputes among Mālikī jurists of North Africa.⁵³

The skeptical position with regard to the narrative sources was thus given clear theoretical expression by the late 1940s, and elicited desultory (and not decisively convincing) efforts to refute it, particularly from Muslim scholars such as M.M. Azami;⁵⁴ but for several decades no significant effort was made to apply it rigorously in reconstructing Islamic origins, or to insist on its acceptance by scholars who adhered to other approaches.

Since the mid-1970s several new advocates for the skeptical position have forced a fundamental reconsideration of the sources for early Islamic history (including the writing of this book). Of most direct concern for our subject are John Wansbrough,⁵⁵ Patricia Crone

⁵¹Schacht, "A Revaluation of Islamic Traditions;" see also his "On Mūsā b. 'Uqbā's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*." Schacht's *magnum opus*, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (1950), does not deal directly with historiography, but has important implications for it because of its preoccupation with the question of the authenticity of early Prophetic tradition.

⁵²Schacht also differed from Lammens in that he offered an explicit statement of his assumptions and method.

⁵³Brunschvig, "Ibn 'Abd al-h'akam et la conquête de l'Afrique du Nord."

⁵⁴Azami, *Studies in Early Hadīth Literature*; *idem*, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*. Motzki, *Anfänge der islamischen Jurisprudenz*, 22–49, offers a thorough examination of Schacht's theories and the reaction to them on the part both of supporters and opponents.

⁵⁵Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies* (1977); *idem*, *Sectarian Milieu* (1978). Wansbrough's most lucid exegete has been Rippin, e.g. "Literary Analysis of Qur'ān, *Tafsīr*, and *Sīra*."

and Michael Cook,⁵⁶ Suliman Bashear,⁵⁷ Gerald Hawting,⁵⁸ Moshe Sharon,⁵⁹ Judith Koren and Yehuda D. Nevo,⁶⁰ and Norman Calder.⁶¹

The assumptions underlying the work of the recent wave of skeptical scholars can be summed up as follows: 1) The Qur'ān was only codified as a closed canon of sacred text much later than assumed by Muslim tradition—during the second, or perhaps even the third, century AH, not early in the first century as Muslims and most Western scholars have assumed; hence, the Qur'ān itself cannot be used as evidence for the origins of Islam, but only for its later development. 2) The narratives of Islamic origins are all to be viewed as “salvation history,” idealized or polemicized visions of the past actually originating in a later period; there is no “kernel” of historical information, for such information either was never conveyed, or was completely suppressed, or if it did survive is inextricably entangled with later interpolations. 3) The narratives about the life of the Prophet are largely exegetical in nature, and do not represent a body of evidence about Islamic origins independent of the Qur'ān text itself or of later legal tradition. Of these revisionist propositions, the notion that the Qur'ānic text is actually one that crystallized some time—perhaps centuries—after Islam's supposed beginnings is perhaps the most radical; although a

⁵⁶Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* (1977); Crone, *Slaves on Horses* (1980); Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987); Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma* (1981); see also Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph* (1986), as well as many articles by Crone and Cook.

⁵⁷Bashear, *Muqaddima fi l-ta'rikh al-ākhar* (1984).

⁵⁸Mainly in a series of articles firmly grounded in the tradition-critical approach, e.g. Hawting, “The Disappearance and Recovery of Zamzam and the ‘Well of the Ka'ba,’” *idem*, “The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca.” Curiously, despite his sometimes radical reinterpretations on specific points relating to the period of Islamic origins, Hawting's general vision of Umayyad history, presented in his *The First Dynasty of Islam* (1987), is thoroughly recognizable and familiar, as noted in the review of it by Humphreys, 38–39.

⁵⁹“The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land,” *idem*, “The Umayyads as *Ahl al-Bayt*,” esp. 121–33.

⁶⁰Koren and Nevo, “Methodological Approaches to Islamic Studies.”

⁶¹Calder works mainly on the development of the Islamic legal tradition, but seems to espouse the theories of Wansbrough regarding the Qur'ān and other early Islamic texts. See Calder, “From Midrash to Scripture,” *idem*, “The *Qurrā'* and the Arabic Lexicographical Tradition.”

form of this idea was apparently broached as early as 1916,⁶² it gained little following until the publication, in 1977, of John Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies* and a book that was, apparently, inspired in part by Wansbrough's ideas, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook's *Hagarism: the Making of the Islamic World*.⁶³

Something of a hybrid or compromise position between the skeptical and the tradition-critical schools is advanced in the works of John Burton.⁶⁴ On the one hand, he accepts the early date of the Qur'ān as a canonical text, and so parts company on this point with skeptics such as Wansbrough. On the other hand, he argues—somewhat like Lammens—that ultimately the “historical” accounts of Islamic origins are really inspired by Qur'ānic exegesis and are not independent historical reports. He sees the development of the Islamic traditional materials as falling into two phases. In the first phase, the Believers produced an “atomistic,” phrase-by-phrase gloss on various passages in the Qur'ān, producing (out of whole cloth, Burton implies) “exegetical *ḥadīths*” to support their interpretations of the text. That is, the meaning of a particular passage was “explained” on the basis of narratives about the supposed circumstances surrounding the revelation of the passage in question, or spurious “historical” material was fabricated to clarify the many obscurities in the Qur'ānic text by providing the supposed specifics to which a particular Qur'ānic passage makes only oblique reference. These early “atomistic” commentaries thus included much spurious narrative material; at a later date, the exegetical origins of

⁶²Mingana, “The Transmission of the Qur'ān” (1916), argued that the Qur'ān was first collected and officially written in 'Abd al-Malik's time; his argument is refuted by Abbott, *Rise of the North-Arabic Script* (1939), 48–49. (I have not succeeded in securing a copy of Mingana's article.)

⁶³On these works, see above, 22–23 nn. 55–56. Wansbrough seems to have been responsible for sparking the debate, but expressed his ideas—presumably intentionally—in almost incomprehensible language (see below, 38 and n. 8); Crone and Cook sought to ventilate these guiding ideas in plain English, and to draw what they felt to be some of the main historical implications of them.

⁶⁴Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'ān* (1979); *idem*, “Towards a Fresh Perspective on the Islamic *Sunna*.” An interesting recent contribution that highlights both the similarities and the differences between the approaches of Wansbrough and Burton is Crone, “Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Early History of the Qur'ān.”

these *ḥadīths* having been forgotten, this material was used to write the “history” of the Prophet’s life, and to explain the Qur’ānic text in a second layer of exegetical activity. Burton, then, in contrast to both Goldziher and Schacht, argues that exegesis lies at the bottom of the *ḥadīth* and *sīra* material. For this reason, Burton rejects most of the Islamic narrative or historical tradition on Islamic origins.

Both the tradition-critical approach and the skeptical approach share an awareness of the complexities of oral transmission; in a sense, the skeptical approach may be seen as a variant on the tradition-critical approach, which it modifies by adopting pessimistic assumptions about our ability to penetrate the tradition. These assumptions deserve a closer look, and form the focus of the next section.

Critique of the Skeptical Approach

The skeptical approach derives plausibility from years of source-critical and tradition-critical research that has conclusively demonstrated the existence in Islamic tradition of a heavy overlay of pious legend and the influence of manipulations, distortions, and fabrications of all kinds. This tampering with the tradition makes it unclear where the kernel of historical “truth” may lie, and gives the skeptics the opening to claim that there is no historical kernel at all, only successive layers of repeatedly reshaped and redacted material. Indeed, it is an easy step from claiming that the tradition includes much spurious material about Islamic origins, as tradition critics do, to saying that it contains *only* spurious or distorted material, or to saying that while authentic material on Islamic origins may be found in it, there is no way to distinguish the authentic from the spurious, the wheat from the chaff. In either case, the practical implications for modern historians are that we cannot use the Islamic sources to reconstruct Islamic origins, and should look elsewhere for our evidence, or quit trying altogether.⁶⁵

Moreover, the skeptical argument is difficult to refute decisively, because it claims that the existing sources provide a heavily redacted, and hence false, image of Islamic origins, *all authentic evidence for the true*

⁶⁵Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*, 3, urge us to look elsewhere; Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, x, suggests that it is futile to try. Watt, “The Reliability of Ibn Ishāq’s Sources,” attempts a brief rebuttal.

nature of which has been purged from the tradition.⁶⁶ That is, it asks us to accept on faith—since there is no surviving evidence—that the true origins of Islam are different than what is portrayed by Islamic tradition—perhaps radically different.⁶⁷ The main evidence that supporters of the skeptical argument can adduce from within the Islamic tradition itself is the fact that the tradition abounds in contradictions and evidence of redaction, but merely noting this is a long way from proving the existence of something that, they say, has been totally expunged. And, over the years, a number of authors have contested aspects of the skeptics' assumption that the "historical" accounts about Islamic origin themselves derive from either Qur'ānic exegesis or later legal argument.⁶⁸

There are, moreover, further weaknesses in the radically skeptical argument. First, the notion that the whole tradition has been completely reshaped according to later dogma seems unlikely, *a priori*, for several reasons. 1) At no time has the Islamic community been free of religious, political, and social tensions and disagreements—not, at least, since the First Civil War (AH 35–40/656–61 CE). From that early date onward, there existed not one but several competing political and theological points of view (e.g. Khārijī, Shī'ī, Umayyad, and Murjī'ī

⁶⁶E.g. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 7: "The religious tradition of Islam is thus a monument to the destruction rather than the preservation of the past. It is in the *Sīra* of the Prophet that this destruction is most thorough, but it affects the entire account of the religious evolution of Islam until the second half of the Umayyad period; and inasmuch as politics were endowed with religious meaning, it affects political history no less." See also Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam*, 230.

⁶⁷The scholar approaching Islamic origins from the perspective of History of Religions would argue that the only useful information is how later tradition perceived those origins, not what they actually were; for the historian, however, who wants to know what happened, this is but a cop-out. The conviction that the "true" story of Islamic origins is in some ways *radically* different from the traditional view provides adherents of the skeptical school with their crusading zeal and sense of superiority over the "traditionalists," whose work they denigrate; for, if the "pre-redaction" view of Islamic origins turned out to be essentially the same as the view after redaction, there would be little motivation to pursue the skeptical argument with such vigor. The zealous tone and attitude of superiority (or better, perhaps, iconoclastic glee?) is most palpable in Crone's *Slaves on Horses* (e.g. 13–15).

⁶⁸Noth, "Zum Verhältnis von Recht und Geschichte im Islam;" Rubin, "Qur'ān and *Tafsīr*;" *idem*, *Eye of the Beholder*, esp. 226–33.

perspectives, to take only the most obvious candidates for the first two centuries). Each of these was espoused by a significant sub-community, and because there was no central person or institution with generally recognized authority to promulgate what constituted “official” doctrine, the situation within the Islamic community at large might best be described as one of “multiple orthodoxies,” rather than simply one of an established orthodox and several heterodox or heretical positions. Yet the fact remains that on most central features of the traditional origins story, these different orthodoxies show marked agreement, a fact that the skeptical school never addresses.⁶⁹ 2) There existed in the community of Believers no “authorities” who had the power to impose a uniform dogmatic view. Scholars who champion the skeptical outlook speak loosely of extensive redaction of the tradition, but they seldom bother to identify the people or group(s) who are supposed to have implemented this redaction, or exactly what purposes were served by doing so.⁷⁰ Yet, without such identifications, the thesis of a comprehensive redaction of the tradition as a whole into a unified form remains merely an abstraction with no visible historical support. 3) The skeptical school asks us to believe that these unnamed “authorities,” whoever they were, could have tracked down every book and tradition contained in every manuscript in the whole Islamic community, from India to Spain, so that no view dissenting from the standard orthodox position was allowed to survive. Even if, for the sake of argument, we grant the existence of a “standard orthodoxy,” such comprehensive control is simply unbelievable, given the nature of society and the state of communications in the early Islamic world.⁷¹ The early Islamic community was not integrated in a tightly knit hierarchical structure, but consisted rather of a mosaic of small sub-communities and sub-sects. Each

⁶⁹On the question of “multiple orthodoxies” and the consensus among different “sects,” see below, 285–90.

⁷⁰This is a failing that is also shared largely by the tradition-critical approach.

⁷¹The difficulty of tracking down every work is demonstrated by a quote of the thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. In the opening pages of his encyclopaedia of toponyms, he mentions Abū ‘Ubayd al-Bakrī’s *Mu‘jam mā ista‘jama*, lamenting the fact that “I have not seen it [even] after searching for it and inquiring about it,” yet, al-Bakrī’s work clearly existed in Yāqūt’s day, since it is still extant. See Yāqūt, *Kitāb mu‘jam al-buldān*, 7–8.

of these preserved its own traditions, which sometimes included widely divergent views, even on matters deemed by the “orthodox” to be most theologically central and politically sensitive. These divergent traditions often remained for centuries out of reach of any effective control by the “authorities,” and in not a few cases have survived to our own day: consider, for example, the wildly unorthodox gnostic traditions, thinly Islamicized, to be found in some early Shī‘ī literature,⁷² or the widespread existence of conflicting accounts on the religious and political claims of important early members of the community of Believers.⁷³

There is little reason to think, therefore, that significant opinions and debates relating to Islamic origins have died out so completely that no echo of them can be identified in the sources. Indeed, on *a priori* grounds it might be seen as just as plausible to assert virtually the opposite of the skeptics’ position: that in any body of traditional material that is as massive and was cast into written form as early as the Muslim narratives on Islamic origins, some vestige of *all* significant opinions and events will survive, much as the surface scattering of potsherds on an archaeological tell will include not only pottery from the latest occupations, but from all previous ones, even the earliest, as well.⁷⁴ It is noteworthy that in a century of close work on Islamic origins, during which a vast number of new sources of every variety have been recovered from manuscripts and published, the new debates or opinion groups that have come to light appear to be not so much ones that reveal dangerous opinions suppressed by the “authorities,” but marginal positions that simply died out for lack of sufficient interest to sustain them in the community.⁷⁵ For this reason, it seems plausible to assert that the traditional Islamic material, considered as a whole, notwith-

⁷²Some of this material is related in Halm, *Die islamische Gnosis*.

⁷³These are treated under the rubric *fitna*; see below, 184–90.

⁷⁴We must note, however, that this assertion is just as self-serving and impossible of proof as its converse, namely that the tradition has completely suppressed all traces of early issues and events.

⁷⁵The most striking example is the material contained in Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād’s *Kitāb al-ḥitan*; for example, it offers numerous accounts supporting the claim of Qaḥṭānī tribesmen to leadership of the community, an attitude that was apparently not competitive in a community that seems, fairly early, to have become convinced that the only genealogical claim of import in deciding leadership was membership in the Prophet’s tribe, Quraysh. On genealogical legitimation, see below, 104–11;

standing the (sometimes) extensive redaction of particular parts of it, contains embedded within it sufficient material to reconstruct at least the main issues debated by Believers in the early Islamic period, and the basic attitudes of the main parties to those debates.

Moreover, we may note that the skeptical approach, like the source-critical and tradition-critical approaches, was heavily indebted to—one might almost say inspired by—earlier work in the field of Biblical criticism.⁷⁶ Given the fact that the “historical” books of the Old Testament and the traditional Muslim accounts of Islamic origins do display some striking similarities in content, structure, and issues, the application to the latter of methods first developed to analyze the former is fully justified. But the skeptical scholars adopt not only some of the methods of Biblical criticism; they have apparently embraced as well some of the Biblical critics’ *conclusions*—in particular, the highly pessimistic outlook on the reliability of the tradition as an historical source, and views on hierarchy, redaction, and uniformity of the tradition. It is far from clear, however, that these conclusions—which, in the hands of the scholars of Islamic origins, become assumptions—are applicable to the study of the Islamic materials, which crystallized much more rapidly than the Old Testament tradition, in much better-known historical circumstances, and which display far greater inner diversity than does the Biblical material.⁷⁷

Even if we ignore, for the sake of argument, these two objections to the skeptical approach, there remains a third problem with it. Although the skeptics claim that the whole tradition has been redacted to fit later orthodox positions, many accounts survive in the Islamic tradition that appear to retain vestiges of very early theological and historical matters, some of which do not square well with later ortho-

on the question of attitudes and concerns that became marginal to the mainstream Islamic tradition, see below, 214–29.

⁷⁶Wansbrough’s heavy-handed application of terminology from Biblical criticism to analysis of the Qur’ān is a particularly striking reflection of this. Albrecht Noth applies the parallels more subtly; he was among the first to apply to the Islamic historical narratives the methods of Biblical tradition-criticism, which he presumably learned at an early age from his father, Martin Noth, author of a pathbreaking study of the Deuteronomistic history.

⁷⁷This point is made, with particular reference to Wansbrough’s hypotheses about the Qur’ān, in Whelan, “Forgotten Witness.”

dox positions. We can glimpse in the sources, for example, some of the very early tensions in the community of Believers: the rivalry between the Muhājirūn and Anṣār in Muḥammad's day, concerns over the proliferation of wealth among some Believers during the conquest period, tensions over the disposition of lands in Iraq and Egypt during the First Civil War, the question of the status of the Anṣār in the leadership of the community in the years up to and during the First Civil War—not to mention the intense rivalry for leadership among 'Alids, Umayyads, Khārijīs, and others. It has even been possible in a few cases to provide a plausible reconstruction of certain episodes going back to Muḥammad's youth that are completely at variance with the later dogmatic view on sensitive theological points.⁷⁸ Even a few such examples are sufficient to call into question the sweeping skeptical claim that the entire "true" story of Islamic origins has been irretrievably lost in the Islamic tradition (with its implication that historians should ignore the Islamic sources entirely in favor of other kinds of sources) and serve as justification for continuing the arduous scholarly labor of unraveling the many layers of accrued tradition on particular points of history and doctrine.

Objections to the skeptical approach couched in such general terms, however, can do justice neither to it as a methodology, nor to the complexity of Islamic historiographical tradition and its evolution. We must, therefore, move on to consider the development of the Islamic historiographical tradition in fuller detail. In order to do so, however, we must first clear up some issues raised by proponents of the skeptical approach. This is undertaken in Chapter 1, which is devoted to establishing the early date of the Qur'ānic text. Chapter 2 builds on this by reconstructing, partly through an analysis of the Qur'ān, the intense dedication to piety that I consider to have been the basic attitude of the early community of Believers, and considers the implications of this attitude for historical writing. The third chapter attempts to sketch out approaches to legitimation in the early Islamic community,

⁷⁸E.g. Kister, "A Bag of Meat," which traces the tradition's not-quite-successful efforts to disguise a report showing Muḥammad, before his call to prophecy, making offerings to pagan idols in Mecca; *idem*, "'A Booth like the Booth of Moses. . .,'" which studies a report suggesting that Muḥammad expected the imminent end of the world. (Both are reprinted in his *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*.)

and situates both early Islamic piety and the rise of historical writing in that context. Chapters 1–3 together thus constitute an overview of the intellectual context in which narratives of Islamic origins first emerged. The chapters of Part II deal with the character of the Islamic historiographical tradition in its own right. In this part, I draw heavily on the work of the tradition-critical school, particularly that of Albrecht Noth, who pioneered the thematic analysis of Islamic materials. His work remains indispensable, but his decision not to include in his analysis themes relating to the Prophet Muḥammad made it difficult to see how the tradition as a whole worked as an exercise in legitimation, and obscured what I take to be the intimate link between communal identity and historical writing, which is the central point of this book.

PART I

THE INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT OF EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORICAL WRITING

CHAPTER 1

THE DATE OF THE QUR'ĀNIC TEXT

The Problem

The beginnings of historical writing in the Islamic tradition must be seen in relation to the character of the early community of Believers, particularly its attitude toward history. The main body of evidence for such an examination has traditionally been considered to be the text of the Qur'ān, which was assumed to be contemporaneous with Muḥammad and his early followers, and therefore indicative of their beliefs and values. Some of the revisionist theories of Islamic origins discussed in the Introduction, however, deny the early date of the Qur'ān, and so raise the possibility that the character of the early community of Believers may be forever beyond the reach of historical reconstruction. The present chapter, then, will attempt to demonstrate that the Qur'ānic text must be considered early—revisionist critiques notwithstanding—and so will establish the basis of evidence for some of the analysis in the remaining chapters of Part I, where we consider the intellectual matrix out of which early Islamic historical writing emerged.¹

Among the revisionist treatments of the Qur'ān, the work of Wansbrough, in particular, creates problems for the would-be historian of the early community of Believers. Wansbrough, starting from the fact that

¹Some of the ideas in this chapter were presented as part of a public lecture at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, on 28 January 1986.

the Qur'ān contains several different kinds of material, hypothesizes that different parts of the Qur'ān originated in different communities, some or all of which, he suggests, were located not in Arabia, but in Iraq or Syria. Moreover, his literary analysis of the Qur'ān leads him to conclude that the Qur'ānic text as we now know it coalesced only slowly and did not assume final form until the late second/eighth century or even later. He argues that the texts that finally were accorded scriptural status were merely a small part of the much larger body of pious maxims, stories, wisdom literature, etc. that circulated—orally, at first—in the various communities. The vast majority of this material, on the other hand, never attained the status of scripture, and became instead the stuff of *ḥadīth*²—or, in some cases, was dropped altogether if it was deemed to fall outside the bounds of the slowly evolving notions of Islamic orthodoxy. Wansbrough considers the Qur'ān, then, like the *ḥadīth* and other narrative sources for the history of early Islam, to be a product of what he has aptly called the “sectarian milieu” of inter-confessional and political polemics. In this arena—presumably comprising the countries of the Fertile Crescent—Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Believers or proto-Muslims bounced ideas and claims off one another until, after a few centuries, all groups had clearly defined their theological, ritual, and sociological boundaries as distinct confessions.

Although he does not think that the Qur'ān existed as a closed canon of text until the end of the second/eighth century or even later, Wansbrough admits that some of the material that eventually was enshrined in it did circulate earlier.³ This latter point is of no small importance, because it permits Wansbrough to claim that even early documentary quotes from the Qur'ān (for example, Qur'ānic verses found in first/seventh-century inscriptions) cannot be taken as evidence of the Qur'ān's existence as a closed canon of text at an early date; rather, they can only be taken as evidence that those passages of what was to become the Qur'ānic text already existed at that time, leaving still un-

²See, for example, the opening phrase of Wansbrough's *Qur'ānic Studies*, 1: “Once separated from an extensive corpus of prophetic *logia*, the Islamic revelation became scripture. . . .” By “prophetic *logia*,” he presumably means sayings by and about the Prophet—what we usually call *ḥadīth*.

³E.g. *ibid.*, 44.

resolved the question of when the whole Qur'ān as a canonized closed text first crystallized.

Wansbrough's work contains many cogent observations about the Qur'ānic text, but many of his arguments can be challenged. For example, one of the ways in which Wansbrough supports his claim that the Qur'ānic text evolved slowly over a prolonged period—roughly two centuries—is by analyzing certain passages in which the Qur'ān has variant versions of the same information. He argues fairly persuasively that the variants imply an evolution of the text over time, and tries to establish the temporal sequence of the variants relative to one another. However, even if one concurs with Wansbrough's specific conclusion on this point, it remains possible that the development he posits could have taken place within thirty years, rather than two hundred.⁴

Another objection that has been raised to Wansbrough's thesis hinges on the fact that certain early (and, it seems, authentic) Islamic texts mention recitation or reading of the Qur'ān as a duty, and quote a variety of Qur'ānic passages in various contexts, evidently from the author's memory. Both facts suggest that the Qur'ān was already available as a scriptural canon at the time the texts were compiled.⁵

A further difficulty with Wansbrough's interpretation may lie in his view of the variant Qur'ānic readings that have been preserved by Muslim tradition. Wansbrough argues that these variants represent the residue of paraphrasing Qur'ānic ideas that took place during what he terms the process of "masoretic exegesis" (i.e. textual editing?), which Wansbrough links to the evolution of classical Arabic grammar. This notion, however, has recently been challenged in a careful study of the development of Arabic grammar.⁶

Another weakness in Wansbrough's case is that he nowhere suggests *who* was responsible for deciding what did, or did not, belong to the Qur'ānic canon. To pin the responsibility for such a process simply

⁴This point was first made, I believe, by Graham in his review of *Qur'ānic Studies*, 140.

⁵See al-Qāḍī, "The Impact of the Qur'ān on Early Arabic Literature;" *eadem*, "The Religious Foundations of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice," 270–71 (on quotes), 258 (on recitation/reading Qur'ān). On the authenticity of the epistles, see al-Qāḍī, "Early Islamic State Letters."

⁶Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis*, 83.

on "the community" or "the scholars" is too vague; we need to have some idea of what individuals, or at least what groups, were involved in making such decisions, and what interests they represented; yet Wansbrough remains silent on this question. Similarly, he fails to explain how the eventual Qur'ānic vulgate was, in the late second century AH, imposed on people from Spain to Central Asia who may have been using somewhat different texts for a long time, and why no echo of this presumed operation—which, one imagines, would have aroused sharp opposition—is to be found in our sources.

It is, however, virtually impossible to refute Wansbrough's interpretation by systematic argumentation, because his own observations are not presented as an integrated argument. Rather, Wansbrough creates a series of loosely connected and wide-ranging hypotheses which together seem to imply his main conclusions about the date and provenance of the Qur'ānic text by their collective weight and mutually supporting character, rather than because they form a linear set of deductions.⁷ The confused presentation of Wansbrough's works on the Qur'ān makes grasping even his basic points all the more difficult.⁸ Because Wansbrough offers no fully articulated chain of argument, it is difficult to build a systematic, logical refutation of his interpretation; refutation of a particular point may somewhat undermine the plausibility of the whole, but the validity of his interpretation could still be said

⁷Some of these overlapping hypotheses take us far afield; *Qur'ānic Studies* includes not only the initial chapter dealing with the date and provenance of the Qur'ān, but also chapters dealing with "Emblems of Prophethood" (a loose discussion of some concepts associated with Muḥammad's claim to be a prophet or apostle), with the rise of Classical Arabic (which Wansbrough links to the canonization of the Qur'ānic text) and, extensively, with the rise and development of the science of Qur'ānic commentary. The latter two themes have recently been re-examined in Versteegh's *Arabic Grammar and Qur'ānic Exegesis*; Versteegh acknowledges Wansbrough's many insights, but does not accept his thesis of a late Qur'ānic text (*ibid.*, 77) and challenges many of Wansbrough's other specific arguments.

⁸Wansbrough's awkward prose style, diffuse organization, and tendency to rely on suggestive implication rather than tight argument (qualities not found in his other published works) have elicited exasperated comment from many reviewers: e.g. on *Qur'ānic Studies*, Paret in *Der Islam* 55 (1978), 354 bottom; van Ess in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 35 (1978), 350; Graham in *JAOS* 100 (1980), 138; on *Sectarian Milieu*, Madelung in *Der Islam* 57 (1980), 354–55; van Ess in *BSOAS* 43 (1980), 137–39.

to remain intact on the basis of the other observations and associations he makes.

There is, however, another strategy we can adopt to test a loosely constructed interpretation such as Wansbrough's. The proof of a set of linked hypotheses such as Wansbrough's claims about the Qur'ān ultimately lies in the cogency of its implications. Does the Qur'ān really have the characteristics of a text that crystallized over two (or more) centuries, and largely outside Arabia, as Wansbrough's hypothesis implies? The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to examining this question. As we shall see, the evidence will cast doubt both on Wansbrough's assertion that the Qur'ān crystallized slowly during the first two centuries of the Islamic era, and his view that the text crystallized outside of Arabia. While not serving as absolute proof, our arguments will tend to support the traditional view that the Qur'ān text is a literary artifact emanating from the earliest community of Believers in Arabia.

Let us begin with the question of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* literature. If the Qur'ān text is really a product of the same milieu that produced the *ḥadīths* and the origins narratives, so that the *ḥadīth* and various passages in early narrative sources contain (to use Wansbrough's own phrase) "sub-canonical" versions of Qur'ānic material,⁹ why is the content of the Qur'ān so *different* from that of the other materials? Anyone who has read much of both Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* will recognize that they differ dramatically in content—a general point that, I believe, Wansbrough nowhere addresses. A ready explanation of this difference might be that the Qur'ān and the other materials crystallized at roughly the same time and in roughly the same historical circumstances, but for very different purposes: the Qur'ān for liturgical needs and recitation, the *ḥadīths* and pseudo-historical origins narratives to serve the exegetical and historicizing needs of the community (and all, perhaps, to serve the legal needs of the community). Setting aside the question of whether the Qur'ān text really is best understood as originating as a liturgy—a proposition of Wansbrough's that I also find dubious—we can still note that the differences between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are so fundamental that the plausibility of

⁹ *Sectarian Milieu*, 5. Cf. van Ess' review, 137–39.

the whole scheme and timetable of Qur'ānic coalescence that Wansbrough has proposed is called into question. Let us examine a number of examples.

Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on Religious and Political Authority

One of the most striking aspects of the corpus of *ḥadīth* and the origins narratives in general (including those origins narratives that were compiled into the standard Muslim biographies of Muḥammad) is the degree to which they reflect the salient political issues of the first and second centuries AH. The *ḥadīth* books are full of traditions about what constitutes good and bad leadership of the community, and under what circumstances Muslims are required to follow their leaders.¹⁰ For example, we find many *ḥadīths* in which the Prophet addresses the question of obedience toward constituted authority—whether of *imām* (religious leader), *khalīfa* (“successor” of the Prophet as political leader of the Muslim community), or *amīr* (commander, governor). Frequently, the emphasis is on obedience. “True religion (*dīn*),” the Prophet says, “is being faithful to God, His book, and to the *imāms* of the Muslims.”¹¹ Quite common are statements of the Prophet like: “Whoever obeys me obeys God; and whoever disobeys me disobeys God. Whoever obeys my *amīr* obeys me; and whoever disobeys my *amīr* disobeys me.”¹² We find injunctions not to curse governors (*wulāt*), or not to curse governors or Companions of the Prophet.¹³ Sometimes the Prophet states flatly that the *imām* must be obeyed.¹⁴ This duty to obey is sometimes

¹⁰After this chapter had been drafted, I encountered the article by Kister, “Social and Religious Concepts of Authority in Islam,” which provides many additional accounts on this theme, drawn from a wide array of sources, that supplement those cited here.

¹¹Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, XV, 99–100 (no. 7941). The reference to “the *imāms* of the Muslims” may indicate a date for the formulation of this *ḥadīth* sometime in the second century or later.

¹²*Ibid.*, XIV, 76 (no. 7643); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* VIII, 104 (*Aḥkām*, introduction).

¹³E.g. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, 82–84; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, IV, 214–15 (nos. 4658, 4659; *Sunna* 11).

¹⁴E.g. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-kharāj*, 80–81. Note also sentiments like: “He who withdraws a hand from obedience shall have no argument on Judgment Day; and he who dies apart from the community (*jamā'a*) dies the death of the Jāhiliya.” Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, VII, 236 (no. 5386) and many other places; al-Bukhārī,

even said to apply in cases where the ruler is a tyrant. "There will be after me *imāms* who do not follow the true guidance (*hudā*) and do not imitate my example (*sunna*); among them will be men with hearts of devils in human bodies." When his interlocutor asks how he should behave should he live to see such a person, the Prophet replies: "Hear and obey the *amīr*, even if your back is whipped and your property is taken; hear and obey."¹⁵

Other *ḥadīths* of the Prophet temper this duty to obey in varying degrees. Some state that obedience is due only as long as the *imām* performs prayer;¹⁶ others make it clear that no obedience is due to a person in disobedience to God.¹⁷ The Prophet repeatedly emphasizes the fact that individuals are responsible for those whose welfare has been entrusted to them, including an *amīr*, who is responsible for the people under him.¹⁸ The Prophet describes punishment of evil *amīrs*, and says that the *amīr* of the affairs of the Muslims¹⁹ who does not strive his utmost to lead them well will not enter paradise with the Believers.²⁰ Among the persons who will receive the harshest punishment on the Day of Resurrection, the Prophet reports, is an "*imām*

Ṣaḥīḥ, VIII, 105 bottom (*Aḥkām* 3); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 239–41 (*Imāra* 85–89); cf. al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, II, 314 (no. 2519; *Siyar* 76). One version in Muslim has *sultān*, "rule, authority," in place of *jamā'a*, "group, community." See also Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VII, 462 (no. 37243), 457 (no. 37200).

¹⁵Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 237–38 (*Imāra* 80). See similar sentiments expressed in Abū 'Ubayd, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, 751–55, esp. nos. 1794–96; Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VII, 447 (no. 37113), in an apocalyptic context.

¹⁶Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, IV, 458 (no. 2265; *Fitan* 78); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 244–45 (*Imāra* 100) enjoins Believers not to draw the sword against the *imām* as long as he performs prayer; and, much like the Christian injunction to "hate the sin but not the sinner," instructs them to hate the *imām's* evil deed or disobedience, but not to waver from obedience.

¹⁷Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VIII, 105–106 (*Aḥkām* 3); Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, V, 301–302 (no. 3790), 340–41 (no. 3889); VI, 301–302 (no. 4668); II, 47–48 (no. 622), 98 (no. 724), 237 (no. 1065), 248 (no. 1095); XI, 59 (no. 6793); etc.

¹⁸Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, VI, 230 (no. 4495); VII, 161 (no. 5167); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VIII, 104 bottom (*Aḥkām*, introduction); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 213 (*Imāra* 24).

¹⁹*amīr yalī amr al-muslimīn*. Is this a vague circumlocution for *amīr al-mu'minīn*?

²⁰Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 215 (*Imāra* 20). See al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, III, 617 (no. 1329), on the "tyrant *imām*" (*imām jā'ir*).

of error" (*imām al-ḍalāla*).²¹ God will bolt the gates of heaven to the *imām* who pays no heed to the poor and miserable.²²

In the *ḥadīth* literature, the Prophet even has a considerable amount to say about the caliphate, even though the office of caliph (*khalīfa*) did not arise until after his death. An interesting account has the Prophet say:

I commend to you fear of God, and to hear and obey, even an Abyssinian slave. Verily those of you who live after me shall see many disagreements (*ikhtilāfan kathīran*), so take my example (*sunnatī*) and the example of the rightly guided caliphs (*al-khulafā' al-mahdiyyīn al-rāshidīn*); cling to it, and sink your teeth into it....²³

The Prophet also gives his followers various indications of how long the succession of caliphs will last before properly God-guided leadership of the community ceases: "This religion will remain standing until you have been ruled by twelve caliphs upon each of whom the community (*umma*) has agreed."²⁴ Another account gives a different scenario: "The succession to prophecy (*khilāfat al-nubūwa*) [will last] thirty years, then God will bring kingship (*mulk*)...."²⁵ Some accounts also have the Prophet providing guidelines on how much money the caliph should receive from the public treasury.²⁶ Not only do we find in the *ḥadīth* literature such intimations of the existence and duration of the caliphate, we even find some sayings in which the Prophet advises his followers on the question of succession to the caliphate. An interesting case is

²¹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, V, 332–33 (no. 3868).

²² Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, III, 619 (no. 1332; *Aḥkām* 6).

²³ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, IV, 200–201 (no. 4607; *Sunna* 6); al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, I, 57 (no. 95; *Muqaddima* 16). Cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, VIII, 105 (*Aḥkām* 3).

²⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, IV, 106 (no. 4279; *Mahdī* 1). See also Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 202–204 (*Imāra* 6–12), for several more versions. Most of these emphasize that the caliphs will come from the tribe of Quraysh. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, V, 294 (no. 3781), has the Prophet say that there will be twelve caliphs, "like the number of leaders (*nuqabā'*) of the children of Israel."

²⁵ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, IV, 211 (no. 4646; *Sunna* 9, near middle). *Mulk* here is clearly a pejorative, implying tyrannical rule not guided by God, as contrasted with *khilāfa* or *imāma*, which do have divine sanction.

²⁶ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, II, 26 (no. 578).

an account in which the Prophet says: "The children of Israel used to be ruled²⁷ by prophets; whenever a prophet died, [another] prophet was created. But there shall be no prophet after me, rather there shall be caliphs, and they shall be numerous." [His followers] said: "Then what do you order us to do?" The Prophet replied: "Fulfill the oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) of the first, and then the first [after him],²⁸ and give them [each] their due which God bestowed upon them, for God shall interrogate them about that with which he entrusted them."²⁹ The implication seems to be that the first person to be recognized as caliph should be considered as having the rightful claim, and that subsequent claimants who might arise to challenge him should be viewed as pretenders. A more blunt version of the same lesson is enshrined in the Prophet's saying: "When the oath of allegiance is sworn to two caliphs, then kill the second of them."³⁰

All of this material reflects a deep concern in the *ḥadīth* literature for questions of political leadership. Who should exercise leadership? According to what principles should it be exercised? What should the community do when faced with the dilemma of a sinful leader, or of two (or more) contending ones? What are the prerogatives of the leader in terms of policy, law, administration, and morals? Moreover, no serious student of *ḥadīth* would doubt that these issues reverberating in the *ḥadīth* literature must be echoes of debates that raged in the community of Believers during the first and second centuries AH/seventh and eighth centuries CE—indeed, it is all too easy, in most cases, to identify a likely historical setting for many individual *ḥadīths* of this kind.³¹

The Qur'ān text, by comparison, has almost nothing to say about political or religious leadership, except as it relates directly to Muḥammad himself (or sometimes to other prophets). It certainly offers no clear guidance on who should exercise political power among the Believers after Muḥammad—or even if anyone should; this simply does

²⁷*kānat tasūsum.*

²⁸The text reads *fū al-bay'ati l-awwali fa-l-awwali.*

²⁹Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, XV, 109–10 (no. 7947).

³⁰Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XII, 242 (*Imāra* 94).

³¹The *ḥadīths* about what to do in the case of an impious *imām*, for example, are probably to be traced to the *qadarīya* dispute of the late first and early second centuries AH.

not seem to be of interest or concern to the Qur'ān. Nor does it provide any indication of *how* power should be exercised; the only exceptions are moral injunctions so general and vague that they apply to all Believers alike, and so do not address the particular problems of political leadership and its rights or responsibilities in relation to its subjects in any meaningful way. Almost the only phrase in the Qur'ān that might be seen as hinting at a continuance of political authority after Muḥammad, in fact, is the famous passage: "Obey God and obey the Apostle and those of authority among you (*ūlī l-amr minkum*),"³² and even this might well be taken to be merely a reference to "those in authority" at the time of Muḥammad—e.g. his subordinate commanders on a raid—rather than an allusion to future governors, caliphs, *imāms*, *wazīrs*, etc.

The same lack of concern for political leadership seems to exist even when the Qur'ān employs words that later became charged with political meaning, such as *khalīfa* ("caliph") or *sunna* ("exemplary practice"). The word *khalīfa* occurs only twice in the Qur'ān, in reference to Adam and David.³³ Although it has been suggested that the second verse in particular may carry "a strong suggestion of sovereignty,"³⁴ it seems that the political meaning of the word *khalīfa* was not self-evident to all early Muslims because in the early exegetical literature *khalīfa* was interpreted to mean "man" generally,³⁵ not specifically a political leader. The concept of the *khalīfa* as head of the Islamic state, or of caliphs as constituting a line of rulers, or as successors to the Prophet, all of which, as we have seen, are found in the *ḥadīth* literature, seems to be entirely absent from the Qur'ān.³⁶ Qur'ānic usage of *khalīfa*, in other words, suggests that these passages, at least, antedate the debate over the political implications of the term that is enshrined in the *ḥadīth*.

The word *sunna* (custom, tradition) occurs a dozen times or so in the Qur'ān, but always in the phrases "God's *sunna*" or "the *sunna* of

³²Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 59; see also v. 83.

³³Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 28; Sūrat Šād (38): 26.

³⁴Lewis, *Political Language of Islam*, 44.

³⁵Al-Qāḍī, "The Term *khalīfa*."

³⁶There is also a sizeable scholarly literature on the original meaning of *khalīfa*—whether "successor" or "deputy" of God. See al-Qāḍī, "The Term *khalīfa*," Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 4–5, for discussion and literature.

the ancients" (*sunnat al-awwalīn*)—never once in the sense of *sunna* of the Prophet, the meaning that is overwhelmingly present in the *ḥadīth* literature, and that seems to have come into general use around 100 AH.³⁷

The discrepancy between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* on the question of political leadership is striking, and suggests strongly that the two bodies of material are not the product of a common "sectarian milieu," but come from somewhat different historical contexts. One could, of course, attempt to argue, in defense of Wansbrough's thesis, that political leadership and related questions were, for some reason, intentionally excluded in the formation of the Qur'ānic canon as it crystallized out of the material circulating in the early community of Believers. In the face of cogent counter-argument, however, it is not sound historical method to adhere to an argument for which no supporting evidence survives. To be plausible, moreover, such a defense would have to explain *why* such matters were intentionally excluded; one can hardly claim that issues of political leadership were too "secular" to be included, in view of the many Qur'ānic passages dealing with other essentially secular issues, such as marriage, divorce, or inheritance. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the inclusion of some explicit guidelines on political leadership would have been extremely useful to the early community and to subsequent generations of Muslim political theorists. The latter were forced to develop a theory of political legitimacy with almost no Qur'ānic basis, and consequently pulled and stretched the interpretation of even the most unlikely Qur'ānic passages in order to find some support in scripture for their political theories—not to mention loading much of the weight of the whole theoretical edifice on the slender basis of the Qur'ān's vague reference to "those of authority among you."

A much more natural way to explain the Qur'ān's virtual silence on the question of political leadership is to assume that the Qur'ān text, as we now have it, *antedates* the political concerns enshrined so prominently in the *ḥadīth* literature. This is what we might expect if the Qur'ān text is the product of the time of Muḥammad and his

³⁷Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 26, 30–39, with references to earlier literature on the concept of *sunna*. Juynboll concludes that the caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz was the first to emphasize the idea of *sunna* as *sunna* of the Prophet.

immediate followers. The likelihood that Muḥammad himself believed that the world was very soon to come to its final end in the imminent Last Judgment may ultimately underlie the Qur'ān's silence on such issues as political succession; for if the Believers thought the world was soon going to end, worrying about long-term leadership (as opposed to the immediate issue of living righteously to attain salvation) was simply irrelevant.³⁸ The irrelevance of political leadership to the Qur'ān seems to me most cogently explained in this manner.

Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on the Prophet's Contemporaries

In a similar vein, we may note the frequent references in the *ḥadīth* and origins narratives to such figures as Muḥammad's cousin 'Alī, his uncles Abū Ṭālib and al-'Abbās, the clan chief Abū Sufyān, etc. These figures were extremely important to later debates about political legitimacy in the Islamic community because they were the ancestors of the main political aspirants of later times, and the way they appear in many *ḥadīths* or in origins narratives makes it obvious that the events described in these accounts, or at least these figures' role as portrayed in those events, are often designed to bolster the political claims of the descendants of these figures in their struggles for power.³⁹

The Qur'ān, on the other hand, makes absolutely no mention of these figures, even in the most innocuous way. Compared to the intrusiveness of such figures in the *ḥadīth* and origins stories, the Qur'ān's silence on them is deafening. Indeed, the only historical personage contemporary with Muḥammad who receives mention by name in the Qur'ān is his uncle Abū Lahab—who, because he opposed Muḥammad's preaching bitterly from the start, was never adduced to support anyone's claim to political leadership in the later Muslim community.⁴⁰ The discrepancy between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* in this respect makes dubious

³⁸Equally irrelevant was worrying about details of one's physical surroundings, such as whether the mosque should be covered by a permanent roof or not; see Kister, "'A Booth like the Booth of Moses. . . .'"

³⁹For a specific example, see Donner, "The Death of Abū Ṭālib;" more generally, see Nöldeke, "Zur tendenziösen Gestaltung der Urgeschichte des Islam's."

⁴⁰It might be noted that Abū Lahab, who is mentioned in the Qur'ān, receives relatively little mention in *ḥadīth*; whereas figures such as Abū Bakr, 'Alī, al-'Abbās,

the suggestion that the two come from a single "sectarian milieu," and crystallized over roughly the same period of time. The discrepancy is more plausibly explained, I believe, by assuming that the Qur'ān text coalesced before the political rivalries that pitted the descendants of Abū Ṭālib, al-'Abbās, Abū Sufyān, etc. against one another had begun to arise. Such circumstances prevailed only before the First Civil War (35–41/656–61).

Similar observations may be made about tribal groups as well as about important individuals. The Qur'ān makes no reference to any tribe except Muḥammad's tribe of Quraysh. The *ḥadīths* attributed to Muḥammad, on the other hand, mention not only Quraysh, but also various tribes, sometimes in quite chauvinistic terms. For example, Muḥammad states that Aslam and Ghifār are better than the two allies (sing. *ḥalīf*) Asad and Ghaṭafān; or that Muzayna and Juhayna are better than Tamīm and 'Āmir ibn Ṣa'sa'a.⁴¹ Such *ḥadīths* seem likely to be vestiges of the inter-tribal rivalries that were prominent especially in the middle and late Umayyad period (*ca.* 680–750), and if the Qur'ān dated from this period and later it is curious that no trace of such tribal animosities can be detected in it. If, on the other hand, we understand the Qur'ān in a more traditional way, as the product of the environment of Muḥammad, this silence is more understandable. Tribal animosities were certainly rife during the decades before and during Muḥammad's career, but the whole thrust of Muḥammad's teaching as presented by the Qur'ān is to emphasize the responsibility of the individual Believer toward other Believers and to God, at the expense of even the closest kinship ties, even that of father to son.⁴²

Anachronisms in Qur'ān and Ḥadīth

The two classes of examples already given are really special cases of what is perhaps the most obvious and fundamental discrepancy between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*: the fact that the Qur'ān itself is totally devoid of obviously anachronistic references to people, groups, or events dating

etc., who are not mentioned in the Qur'ān, are the subjects of dozens of *ḥadīths*. On traditions about Abū Lahab, see Rubin, "Abū Lahab and Sūra CXI."

⁴¹Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, II, 315–16 (nos. 2522–25; *Siyar* 79–80).

⁴²E.g. Sūrat al-Tawba (9): 23.

to periods long after the life of Muḥammad. The *ḥadīth* literature, on the other hand, is full of such anachronisms, as Goldziher pointed out long ago;⁴³ among the supposed utterances of the Prophet one finds descriptions of how the black banners (of the 'Abbāsids) will come from Khurasan, a statement that someone named "al-Saffāḥ" (regnal title of the first 'Abbāsīd) will appear during a *fitna* or period of political schism, and the warning that a tyrant from the Umayyad house will ascend Muḥammad's pulpit.⁴⁴ It is evident that these "predictions" ascribed to the Prophet reveal, in fact, the later origin of the sayings, in these instances dating to the rule of the Umayyads or to the time of the Umayyads' overthrow by the 'Abbāsids in 132/750.

Other *ḥadīths* ascribed to Muḥammad appear to be residues of the Second Civil War in the 60s/680s,⁴⁵ or even earlier events. One apocalyptic *ḥadīth* portrays Muḥammad telling one of his Companions, as he put his hand upon his head:

O Ibn Ḥawāla, when you see that the caliphate has settled in the holy land (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*), then the earthquake and the tribulations and the great events and the Hour has drawn near on that day, nearer to people than this hand of mine is to your head.⁴⁶

This account, it would seem, should be dated to a time shortly after the accession of the Umayyads in Syria in 41 AH/661 CE.⁴⁷ Similarly, references to the Companions of the Prophet becoming scarce, to an abundance of money (such as seem to have occurred during the caliphate of

⁴³Goldziher, "On the Development of the Ḥadīth," in his *Muslim Studies*, II, 15–251 (= *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 3–274).

⁴⁴For references to these *ḥadīths*, see Wensinck, *Handbook*, 79, 101, 139, 236.

⁴⁵E.g. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VII, 460 (no. 37225: Muḥammad predicts the burning of the Ka'ba); al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 430–31 (no. 9754: Muḥammad predicts Muḥājirūn will prosper, Anṣār will not); see also the analysis in Madelung, "'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr and the Mahdī."

⁴⁶Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, V, 288. Another, in which Muḥammad anticipates the First Civil War and rise to power of rulers with close ties to the tribe of Kalb—an obvious reference to Mu'āwiya and the early Umayyads—is found in Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, VII, 460 (no. 37223).

⁴⁷On the dating of apocalyptic traditions, see the classic study of Christian apocalypses by Alexander, "Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources."

‘Uthmān), or the capture of Jerusalem (during the caliphate of ‘Umar) are found in various apocalyptic *ḥadīths*, and suggest in many cases a date no later than the middle of the first century AH.⁴⁸

In the Qur’ān, on the other hand, we find not a single reference to events, personalities, groups, or issues that clearly belong to periods after the time of Muḥammad—‘Abbāsids, Umayyads, Zubayrids, ‘Alids, the dispute over free will, the dispute over tax revenues and conversion, tribal rivalries, conquests, etc. This suggests that the Qur’ān, as it now exists, was already a “closed” body of text by the time of the First Civil War (35–41/656–61), at the latest.

Of course, one might argue that the Qur’ān was actually compiled later, as Wansbrough and his followers contend, but that its compilers were very careful to edit out any material that, being anachronistic, might give away the text’s later origins. But such an argument assumes that these supposed compilers—whose identity has never been clarified in any case—possessed an historical-critical sense akin to ours, which seems unlikely. Moreover, even if we accept such an assumption for the sake of argument, we must then explain why people with such discriminating historical sense should have permitted blatantly anachronistic material to thrive so luxuriantly among the sayings ascribed to Muḥammad in the *ḥadīth* collections, which they also clearly hoped would serve their various political and theological aims. On the basis of this consideration alone, the thesis that the Qur’ān is not an early text, but, like the *ḥadīth*, the product of the late first and second century AH “sectarian milieu,” must be found wanting.

Qur’ān and Ḥadīth on Earlier Prophets

Along somewhat different lines, we can observe that when the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* both discuss a common subject, they sometimes place strikingly different emphasis on it, or treat it in very different ways. For example, both the Qur’ān and the *ḥadīth* literature make frequent mention of the many pre-Islamic prophets who were Muḥammad’s predecessors: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Job, Moses, Jacob, Joseph, David, Jesus, etc. Comparison of the way such figures are treated in the Qur’ān, on

⁴⁸On these traditions see Conrad, “Portents of the Hour.” I am grateful to Dr. Conrad for making a draft of this article available to me.

the one hand, and in the *ḥadīth* literature and origins stories, on the other, reveals a general pattern: usually, the *ḥadīth* and origins narratives know much more about these prophets than is related in the Qur'ān. With a few figures, however, such as the prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people, Thamūd, the emphasis is reversed: the Qur'ān tells us something about them, but the *ḥadīth* literature and origins narratives do not add much.

It is difficult to explain this discrepancy if we assume that all of this material, Qur'ān as well as *ḥadīth*, derives from a common "sectarian milieu." On the other hand, the traditional view on the date and provenance of the Qur'ān provides a much more plausible explanation: the material on the Arabian prophet Ṣāliḥ and his people, like that on Jewish and Christian figures, apparently circulated in the west-Arabian milieu in which Muḥammad lived, but was little-known in Iraq and Syria, where the "sectarian milieu" that produced a good deal of the later *ḥadīth* literature was found. It is therefore perfectly reasonable to expect that Thamūd and Ṣāliḥ would figure more prominently in the Qur'ān than in *ḥadīth*. Conversely, since the Jewish and Christian traditions were among the main competitors that helped shape the outlines of early Islamic tradition as reflected in the *ḥadīth* and origins narratives, it is not surprising that the latter reflect clearly the impact of these rival traditions. The people of Thamūd, on the other hand—whose existence in northwest Arabia in Roman times is confirmed by inscriptions⁴⁹—were no longer a political or theological threat to the early community of Believers. Consequently, the developing Islamic tradition largely ignored Thamūd and its prophet in elaborating its own origins narratives; they were not part of the "sectarian milieu" of the first and second centuries AH, and so never figured prominently in the *ḥadīth*, despite their presence in the Qur'ān.

Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on Muḥammad

Another matter on which the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* appear to adopt different attitudes is the Prophet Muḥammad himself. Wansbrough, it seems, wishes to deny this, or at least to minimize it, and suggests that the Qur'ān and the narrative sources portray Muḥammad (and

⁴⁹See Beauchamp, "Rawwafa et les Thamoudéens."

other prophets) in much the same way.⁵⁰ Both Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, of course, present Muḥammad as a prophet, in the tradition of Noah, Abraham, Jesus, etc.⁵¹ But Muḥammad and his prophethood are very much in the background in the Qur'ān, overshadowed by other figures and themes. Prophets and prophethood constitute only one theme in the Qur'ān, alongside such other major issues as divine omnipotence and mercy, the coming Day of Judgment, injunctions to piety, and cultic and social regulations;⁵² and the overwhelming majority of Qur'ānic passages involving prophets and prophethood are devoted to the many prophets who preceded Muḥammad, not to Muḥammad himself. The Qur'ān affirms Muḥammad's mortality and the fact that, although the recipient and vehicle of God's revelations, Muḥammad is in all other respects an ordinary mortal. Indeed, the Qur'ān presents Muḥammad as suffering indignities from those who, in view of Muḥammad's ordinariness and the absence of miracles, could not believe he was truly a prophet: "They say: 'What is with this apostle? He eats food and walks in the market. Why has no angel been sent down to be a warner (*nadhīr*) with him?'"⁵³

In the *ḥadīth*, on the other hand, Muḥammad is the true focus; all *ḥadīths* are either statements about him or descriptions of his actions by his contemporaries, or statements attributed to him. Moreover, Muḥammad is no ordinary mortal in the *ḥadīth* literature; he is frequently presented as a miracle-worker, able to feed multitudes, heal the sick with his spittle, procure water by pressing the ground with his heel, see behind himself, predict the future, or divine hidden knowledge such as the names of people whom he has not yet met or the origins of a piece of stolen meat served to him. This vision of Muḥammad, as

⁵⁰ *Qur'ānic Studies*, 65: "the biography of Muḥammad formulated in exegetical literature cannot be said either to distort or to contradict scriptural data on the words and deeds of the prophet in general."

⁵¹ A compact presentation of what might be called Muḥammad's "prophetic lineage" is found in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.1, 27.

⁵² Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 80–105, treats prophecy and prophethood as one of eight major themes.

⁵³ Sūrat al-Furqān (25): 7; cf. Sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 188, where Muḥammad describes himself as being only a warner, having no special powers; also Sūrat al-Isrā' (17): 90–94.

was pointed out long ago,⁵⁴ does not coincide with the Qur'ānic image of Muḥammad as a normal man, and once again casts doubt on Wansbrough's proposition that the Qur'ān originated in the same cultural environment that produced the countless miracle-stories related in the *ḥadīth* literature and origins narratives.

Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on Prayer

Both Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* have much to say about ritual requirements and practices, but the way they talk about them differs palpably.⁵⁵ As an example, let us consider the subject of ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*). The Qur'ān makes frequent reference to ritual prayer, often exhorting Believers to perform the prayer conscientiously, etc. But it does not provide a great deal of detail on *how* ritual prayer is to be performed; one gains the impression, rather, that the Qur'ān is referring to prayer rituals that were well-known among the Believers who were the text's initial audience, so that describing details of ritual practice was unnecessary. It does not, for example, even specify clearly how many daily prayers Believers are to perform.⁵⁶

The *ḥadīth* literature, on the other hand, includes thousands of traditions spelling out every aspect of the prayer ritual in minute (and, occasionally, conflicting) detail. Given the importance the Qur'ān acquired as the basis of legal decisions in the Islamic tradition, one is at a loss to explain the Qur'ān's reticence to describe ritual prayer more exactly, if one assumes that the Qur'ān is the product of the same intellectual context that produced the *ḥadīth* literature. On the other hand, if we assume that the Qur'ānic text reflects the conditions of the earliest community of Believers in Arabia, this discrepancy between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* is quite understandable. As the Believers moved out of Arabia, they found it necessary to define their prayer rituals in relation to Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and other prayer practices—partly, perhaps, because new Believers originating in those communities brought

⁵⁴E.g. Horovitz, "Zur Muḥammadlegende;" Andrae, "Die Legenden von der Berufung Muḥammeds;" *idem*, *Die Person Muhammads*.

⁵⁵This discrepancy was noted already in Horovitz, "Bemerkung zur Geschichte und Terminologie des islamischen Kultus."

⁵⁶On this and related issues, see Rubin, "Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam."

knowledge of such ritual practices into the community of Believers, and partly because of the sheer proximity of Believers to well-established Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian congregations in the "sectarian milieu" of the Fertile Crescent. The Qur'ān's incomplete descriptions and vague allusions thus came to be complemented by precise definitions and limitations, often eventually cast in the form of Prophetic *ḥadīths*.

Another aspect of prayer worth considering in this context is the special communal prayer held on Fridays, or *ṣalāt al-jum'a*. Many particular ritual requirements of the Friday prayer—especially the delivery of the *khutba*, or sermon—are spelled out in full detail in the *ḥadīth* literature.⁵⁷ The Qur'ān, on the other hand, says nothing about Friday prayer; the one passage to mention prayer on Friday reads as though the association of the words "prayer" and "Friday" is fortuitous, not reference to a technical term for a special kind of prayer ritual,⁵⁸ and the key rite, the *khutba*, is never mentioned in the Qur'ān. If, as Wansbrough contends, the Qur'ān crystallized in the first two Islamic centuries specifically for liturgical purposes, the omission from the Qur'ān text of any significant mention of, much less description of, one of the main liturgical activities that developed during this time requires some explanation.

Qur'ān and Ḥadīth on Intercession and the Deceased

Many years ago, C.H. Becker argued that the Qur'ānic emphasis on the transitory character of earthly life was different in form and content from that of pre-Islamic Christianity, but that later Islamic sermons of repentance resembled their Christian counterparts.⁵⁹ There is no need to repeat his analysis here; we need only point out that the discrepancy

⁵⁷See the entries in Wensinck, *Concordance*, s.vv. *khutba*, *khatīb*, etc.

⁵⁸Sūrat al-Jum'a (62): 9–11: "(9) O you who Believe: When the call for prayer goes out on Friday, hurry to remember God, and stop doing business. That is better for you, if [only] you knew. (10) And when prayer is over, then go your ways.... (11) When they see shopping or entertainment, they scatter to it, and leave you (Muḥammad) standing [there]. Say [to them]: 'That which is with God is better than entertainment and shopping. God is the best of providers.'"

⁵⁹Becker, "Ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere," which notes that the Qur'ānic form differs both from the pre-Islamic Christian attitude and from that expressed in the lives of Muslim saints.

between Qur'ānic and later Islamic attitudes on this issue would be difficult to explain if we see the Qur'ān as the product of the "sectarian milieu" of the Fertile Crescent that was the matrix for the later Islamic sermons. It is much more plausible to assume that this discrepancy reflects different origins for the two bodies of material—the Qur'ān, in our view, being significantly earlier than the sermons.

Another example of this kind is intercession for the dead, which is treated in both the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*, but in different ways. The *ḥadīth* literature permits intercession by Muḥammad, of course, but also—depending on the authorities conveying the *ḥadīths*—allows it to saints, to all believers, to specific individuals, etc. "There will be in my community," the Prophet is reported to have said, "a man named Ṣīla ibn Ushaym, and there will enter heaven through his intercession such-and-such."⁶⁰ Sometimes intercession is allowed by the *ḥadīth* literature in fabulous degree. "The Apostle of God (ṣ) said: There shall enter paradise through the intercession of one member of my community more [people] than [the number of] the tribe of Tamīm."⁶¹ "'Uthmān ibn 'Affān shall intercede for as many as the [two tribes of] Rabī'a and Muḍar on the Day of Resurrection."⁶²

The liberal attitude toward intercession found in the *ḥadīth* literature is quite different from what one encounters in the Qur'ān, where (as in Jewish tradition) intercession is viewed in an ambivalent way: sometimes it is rejected outright, while on other occasions it is permitted to Muḥammad (in Jewish tradition, to Abraham), but only to him and only in very limited cases—i.e. when the recipient of such intercession already meets God's favor anyway.⁶³ "Beware a Day when no

⁶⁰ Al-Basawī, *Kitāb al-ma'rifa wa-l-ta'rīkh*, II, 77.

⁶¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, IV, 541 (no. 2438; *Qiyāma* 12).

⁶² *Ibid.*, IV, 541 (no. 2439; *Qiyāma* 12).

⁶³ Bowker, "Intercession in the Qur'ān and in the Jewish Tradition." Some *ḥadīth* or narrative accounts also take this line; e.g. 'Umar ibn Shabba, *Ta'rīkh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, I, 118–20, where the Prophet is shown the place where his mother Āmina was buried; he weeps and visits the place, but is not allowed to ask forgiveness for her or to intercede for her. (She died, of course, in Muḥammad's youth, as a non-Muslim.) Watt, "The Qur'ān and Belief in a High God," while discussing the deities of the pre-Islamic pagan cult in Mecca, notes that "the chief function of these lesser dieties was apparently to intercede with a higher being..." so that intercession may have been closely associated with *shirk*.

soul shall [be able to] reward another at all, nor shall intercession be accepted from it. . . .”⁶⁴

The Lexicon of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth

The discrepancies between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* are not limited to topics and issues; we find that they also sometimes differ in the vocabulary used, or favored, to describe a particular thing. We have already noted some instances where a word clearly seems to have a different meaning in the Qur'ān than it does in the *ḥadīth* literature—such as the word *khalīfa*.⁶⁵ In other cases a particular word, while maintaining the same basic meaning, is endowed with a completely new set of associations in the *ḥadīth* literature when compared to its use in the Qur'ān—such as the word *sunna*, which in the Qur'ān entirely lacks the association with the Prophet Muḥammad that predominates in the *ḥadīth* literature.⁶⁶ These cases have already been examined carefully by others and need no further elaboration here.

Conversely, we sometimes find cases in which the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature refer to the same or similar things, but use different words to do so. A case in point is provided by the words for political and/or religious group or community. The word *jamā'a*, a purely Arabic word with the general meaning “group, collectivity,” came to be frequently used in classical Arabic-Islamic discourse to refer to the Muslims as a political and religious community;⁶⁷ it occurs with this meaning, for

⁶⁴Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 45. See also Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana (60): 3: “Neither your relatives nor your children shall benefit you on the Day of Resurrection. He will separate between you; indeed, God discerns what you do.” The next verses explain that even Abraham did not intercede for his people.

⁶⁵See discussion above, 42–44.

⁶⁶See discussion above, 44–45.

⁶⁷For discussion of the varying uses of *jamā'a* in Islamic discourse, see *EI* ², “Djamā'a” (L. Gardet) and As-Sirri, *Religiös-politische Argumentation*. See also Nagel, *Staat und Glaubensgemeinschaft im Islam*, I, 112, 120, 123–24, 135, 302. Gardet points out that Hanbalī jurists wanted to restrict the term to the community of Companions of the Prophet, whereas some other major Muslim thinkers, such as al-Shāfi'ī and al-Ṭabarī, interpreted the term more broadly to mean the Muslims as a politico-religious community both in the Prophet's time and in later periods—even as such collective unity became an increasingly unrealizable ideal.

example, in the classic tenth-century treatise on government by al-Māwardī,⁶⁸ and in many other works.

Exactly when *jamā'a* first came into use in this sense is not clear. It may initially have emerged as a significant term for the community of Believers as a whole during the First Civil War, when conflict between different groups of Believers made the absence of *jamā'a* painfully obvious. It is noteworthy that the year 40 AH, when the First Civil War ended and the Believers "came together" again, was called "the year of *jamā'a*" (*'ām al-jamā'a*),⁶⁹ a usage that expresses palpably the Believers' relief that unity had been regained; in this context it also emphasizes the sense of *jamā'a* as referring to the *political* unity of the community of Believers. It has been suggested that the Umayyads, in particular, were the first to emphasize *jamā'a* in order to reaffirm the importance of political unity (under their leadership, of course);⁷⁰ in the writings of the late Umayyad scribe and administrator, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā, the term's later meaning of "the religio-political community of Muslims" appears to be crystallizing.⁷¹ Perhaps, as others have suggested, the use of *jamā'a* to mean the Muslim community was linked more generally with the claim that leadership in the Muslim community should belong to Quraysh.⁷² In any case, the important point for the present discussion is that the term *jamā'a* was widely used among Muslims from the second century AH, and probably well before. Not surprisingly, the term *jamā'a* occurs quite frequently in the *ḥadīth* literature that took form at just this time. We noted above a number of accounts in which the Prophet is said to have warned

⁶⁸E.g. al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-sultānīya*, 7 middle, 8:3, etc. It should be noted, however, that al-Māwardī uses the word *umma* more frequently than the word *jamā'a*.

⁶⁹See Appendix to Chapter X, "Table of Named Years" (below, 249–54). Al-Sayyid, *Mafāhīm al-jamā'āt fī l-Islām*, 55–57, notes the importance of the concept of *jamā'a* among the Khawārij since the 60s AH/680s CE.

⁷⁰Al-Sayyid, *Al-Umma wa-l-jamā'a wa-l-ṣulṭa*, 132–22, 158–59.

⁷¹'Abd al-Ḥamīd sometimes uses the word *jamā'a* in the general sense of "group" (sometimes, indeed, referring to a group of rebels or non-Muslims), sometimes in the sense of the Muslim community: see, for example, 'Abbās, ed., 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā, 198 (*ahl al-fitna* contrasted with *ahl al-jamā'a*), 212 (*fī kullī majma'in tajma'u minhum Allāh jamā'atan*).

⁷²As-Sirri, *Religiös-politische Argumentation*, 60.

against leaving the *jamā'a* "even by a handspan," lest one die a *jāhili* death.⁷³ It is also used in some narrative accounts referring to the period of the Prophet, such as when he invites the ruler of al-Baḥrayn (eastern Arabia) to Islam, calling him to God, obedience, and entry in the *jamā'a*.⁷⁴

In the Qur'ān, on the other hand, the word *jamā'a* does not appear at all. When the Qur'ān wishes to refer to the Believers as a community, it uses the word *umma*, which originally seems to mean "a people."⁷⁵ *Umma* is also the term used by the document commonly called the "Constitution of Medina" to refer to the original community of Believers in Medina in Muḥammad's day; *jamā'a* does not occur. Although the precise meaning of *umma* and the exact basis of unity it implied has been much debated by Western scholars,⁷⁶ its use in both the Qur'ān and the "Constitution of Medina" is fairly consistent with later use of *jamā'a* in its sense of "religio-political community," and the two words, *umma* and *jamā'a*, are often used almost interchangeably by medieval and modern Muslim scholars.⁷⁷ The fact that the word *jamā'a*, so prominent in the *ḥadīth* literature of the first and second centuries, should be completely absent from Qur'ānic discourse suggests that the Qur'ān took shape before the word *jamā'a* came into widespread use among Believers; otherwise, we would expect the term to be present in the Qur'ānic text. In other words, it implies that the Qur'ān probably coalesced as a text before the First Civil War.

Another example of lexical discontinuity between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and one with very interesting implications, concerns the words for

⁷³See above, 40–41 n. 14.

⁷⁴Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.2, 27. See also the account of the election of Abū Bakr in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 1845, where *jamā'a* is used. The accounts may, of course, reflect later usage.

⁷⁵Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Koran*, 69. Valuable discussion of Qur'ānic terms for social groupings is found in al-Sayyid, *Mafāhīm al-jamā'āt fī l-Islām*, esp. 21–44; *idem*, *Al-Umma wa-l-jamā'a wa-l-sulṭa*, esp. 19–87.

⁷⁶For recent contributions with references to much of the earlier literature, see Rubin, "The 'Constitution of Medina,'" Donner, "From Believers to Muslims."

⁷⁷Gardet, "Djamā'a," tries to find some systematic difference in meaning between *umma* and *jamā'a* on the basis of the way the two terms are used in Muslim tradition, but has trouble discriminating between them semantically. Al-Sayyid, *Al-Umma wa-l-jamā'a wa-l-sulṭa*, 33, equates *jamā'a* and *umma*.

ships. Both the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* mention ships and the sea fairly frequently,⁷⁸ but whereas the *ḥadīth* routinely uses the usual Arabic word *safīna* for ship, the Qur'ān favors the unusual word *fulk*. *Fulk* occurs about two dozen times in the Qur'ān, but *safīna* appears only four times. In the main body of the *ḥadīth* literature, on the other hand, *fulk* is used *only once*, and the one time it is used, it is accompanied by a gloss to inform the reader that it means *safīna*,⁷⁹ making it clear that it was not a word in common use in the "sectarian milieu" that produced the bulk of *ḥadīths*.

The origin of the Qur'ānic word *fulk* is obscure.⁸⁰ A check of appropriate dictionaries reveals that it has no cognates in Akkadian, Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, or Middle Persian. Many years ago, Karl Vollers suggested that Arabic *fulk* is derived from the classical Greek *efólkion*,⁸¹ which meant, in general, "appendage," but in nautical contexts referred to a small boat towed after a ship.⁸² The word *efólkion* does appear—apparently only once—in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a text specifically about the Red Sea region that contains much nautical vocabulary.⁸³ *Efólkion*, however, does not occur at all in New Testament Greek, and in Patristic literature the word is used only to mean "burdensome appendage"—no nautical meaning

⁷⁸See *EI* ¹, "Fulk" (H. Bauer); Barthold, "Der Koran und das Meer."

⁷⁹See Wensinck, *Concordance*, V, 198. The reference is in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 7 (*Buyū'* 10). By comparison, *safīna* occurs a total of more than 60 times in over thirty different *ḥadīths*; see Wensinck, *Concordance*, II, 475, for the references.

⁸⁰Among Muslim savants, the very idea that the "clear Arabic Qur'ān" could have words of foreign origin was long debated. For a brief overview of this question, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 5–11.

⁸¹Vollers, "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der lebenden arabischen Sprache in Aegypten." See also Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran*, 229–30. Vollers' suggestion appears to have been adopted by Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic*, 404. According to Jeffery, Fraenkel, in his book *Die aramäische Fremdwörter im arabischen*, 212, suggested that there may have been an Aramaic intermediary between the Greek and the Arabic. This seems unlikely, however, in view of the absence of the word from either Syriac or Palestinian Jewish Aramaic.

⁸²Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 746a, bottom.

⁸³*Periplus Maris Erythraei*, no. 33, last word. Casson, 71, translates the phrase *skáfas kai efólkia* as "small sailing ships;" cf. Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 230. The exact date of the *Periplus* is hotly debated, but it seems to have been composed sometime in the early centuries CE.

occurs.⁸⁴ The word *efólkion*, meaning something like “ship’s boat,” thus seems to have been current by the early centuries CE mainly—if not solely—in the Greek sailors’ jargon of the Red Sea region; it does not appear to have been used in the nautical sense in the Greek of the Mediterranean littoral.

From “Red Sea Greek,” *efólkion* appears to have been borrowed into South Arabic and Arabic. There is a single inscriptional reference to *’flkm* (*aflāk?*), apparently meaning ships of some kind, in a South Arabic inscription,⁸⁵ probably a loan-word in South Arabic from the Greek. The fact that it is attested only once in the South Arabic inscriptions integrated to date in the dictionaries of that language suggest that in South Arabic it was not common. In early Arabic poetry, the word *fulk* shows up only ten times;⁸⁶ two of these are general references from Arabic lexicons, three more are from poets of the Umayyad period who may, therefore, have been influenced in using the word by Qur’ānic precedent. Of the remaining five attestations, four are by early poets of the Ḥijāz,⁸⁷ and the fifth by a poet who, while not originally from the Ḥijāz, was active around Mecca for some time.⁸⁸ Moreover, one of the three “late” attestations is by a poet of the Umayyad family,⁸⁹ whose native dialect would have been Ḥijāzī dialect.

In sum, Arabic *fulk* appears to have been a local or regional dialect form current in west Arabia, reflecting a peculiar local use in the Red

⁸⁴Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 588a. Cf. the list of classical Greek attestations of *efólkion*, meaning “ship’s boat,” in Casson, *Ships and Seamanship*, 248 n. 93.

⁸⁵Beeston *et al.*, *Sabaic Dictionary*, 44; Biella, *Dictionary of Old South Arabic*, 404.

⁸⁶I am grateful to the Concordance of Arabic Poetry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for providing this information, and indebted to my colleague Dr. Reuven Amitai-Preiss of the Hebrew University for kindly taking the time to copy out the references and send them to me.

⁸⁷Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣālt, *Dīwān*, ed. Saṭlī, 439 no. 62.2, 525 no. 98.11, corresponding to ed. Schulthess, 33 no. 29.5, 37 no. 31.11; Julius Wellhausen, *Lieder der Hudhailiten*, 94 no. 260.30 (by Abū Ṣakhr al-Hudhalī), 110 no. 272.7 (by Mulayḥ ibn al-Ḥakam). On *fulk* in the Hudhayl poems, see Lewin, *Vocabulary of the Hudāilian Poems*, 336.

⁸⁸Al-A’shā Maymūn ibn Qays, *Dīwān* (ed. Ḥusayn), 401 no. 79.29 (corresponding to ed. Geyer, 79.29).

⁸⁹Ubayd Allāh ibn Qays al-Ruqayyāt, *Dīwān* (ed. Najm), 45 no. 14.14 (corresponding to ed. Rhodokanakis, 118 no. 14.14).

Sea basin of Greek *efólkion* and derivatives from it to mean some kind of ship or ship's boat. There is little evidence to suggest that Greek *efólkion* in the sense of Arabic *fulk* was known elsewhere in Arabia outside the Ḥijāz, and no evidence whatsoever to suggest that it was known anywhere in the Mediterranean or Near East outside Arabia and the Red Sea.⁹⁰ The fact that *fulk* is preferred by the Qur'ān over the more usual Arabic *safīna* is therefore impossible to reconcile with the theory that the Qur'ān, like the *ḥadīth*, crystallized slowly in the "secarian milieu" of the Fertile Crescent over a period of two centuries or more. The word's prominence in the Qur'ān suggests that the Qur'ān originated in west Arabia during Muḥammad's lifetime or shortly thereafter, as traditional scholarship contends. On the other hand, precisely because the word *fulk* was unknown in the Fertile Crescent or in the Najdī Arabic dialects that played a crucial role in the formation of classical Arabic, it never became current in the *ḥadīth*, where the more usual Arabic word *safīna* is used when referring to ships.

Conclusions

These examples could probably be multiplied many times, and other analysts will doubtless find more compelling cases of discontinuity between Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*; but we have enough to draw some general conclusions. We must note again that these considerations do not definitively disprove Wansbrough's hypotheses—they only constitute a circumstantial case against it. Decisive refutation of Wansbrough's thesis may only come, if ever, through discovery of *bona fide* documentary evidence in the form of a very early copy of the Qur'ān.⁹¹ But, it must be remembered that Wansbrough's argument for the late date of the Qur'ān itself depends mainly on circumstantial evidence, much of it very abstruse and hard to follow. The evidence reviewed above, which is fairly straightforward, seems to point clearly to a relatively early date for the crystallization of the Qur'ān text, and implies that this event must have been completed before the First Civil War. Moreover, certain elements in the Qur'ān's vocabulary (particularly its use

⁹⁰It is noteworthy that *fulk* does not appear in the surviving works of the pre-Islamic Arabic poets of eastern Arabia, al-Ḥīra on the Euphrates, etc.

⁹¹On some possible documentary evidence of this kind, see the Appendix to this chapter, 62–63 below.

of *fulk*), and some other features (such as its attitude toward ritual) suggest that it crystallized not in the Fertile Crescent, but in the Ḥijāz.

This does not, of course, tell us *exactly* when, or just how, the Qur'ān text was compiled, or exactly what it represents. Many vexing questions about the Qur'ān remain: whether, as Burton claims, it was already an established text at the time of Muḥammad's death, or whether, as Muslim tradition holds, it was only edited together definitively sometime during the quarter-century following Muḥammad's death in 11/632; whether, as Muslim tradition asserts, it represents the utterances of a single inspired prophet, or whether, to modify one of the revisionists' concepts, it represents a blending of texts from several different congregations—possibly different local groups of Arabian Believers. Regardless of how we decide those issues, however, it does seem clear that the Qur'ān text, as we now have it, must be an artifact of the earliest historical phase of the community of Believers, and so can be used with some confidence to understand the values and beliefs of that community—including its attitude toward the past and history. It is to this that we must now turn.

Appendix

SOME DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Recently, Yehuda Nevo has analyzed the content of a number of early Arabic inscriptions from the Negev and elsewhere in geographical Syria and concluded that the information in them seems to support Wansbrough's theory of the Qur'ān's codification, both as to date (relatively late—second or third century AH) and place (Fertile Crescent, rather than Arabia).⁹² His argument, however, is circular. The absence of specifically Qur'ānic or Muslim phraseology from the generic monotheism of the earliest Negev texts, which he carefully demonstrates, may be taken as evidence for late codification of the Qur'ān only if we knew that the Qur'ānic text crystallized in this region (i.e. the Negev, or at least geographical Syria) rather than somewhere else, such as Arabia; but the crystallization of the Qur'ān outside Arabia is merely another of Nevo's (and Wansbrough's) assumptions, not a known fact. If we assume the Qur'ān to be an early text of Arabian origin, on the other hand, the gradual penetration of a pre-existing monotheistic discourse by Qur'ānic phraseology over the course of a few centuries is exactly what we might expect to find, as the Qur'ān became gradually better-known among Arabic-speaking monotheists in Syria.

Moreover, Nevo's theory also assumes that the people who left these inscriptions would have known the Qur'ān from *written* texts, and would have wished to copy the text exactly as they saw it. But it seems highly likely that most early Believers first came to know parts of the Qur'ān through *oral* transmission—the basic meaning of *qur'ān*, after all, is "recitation."⁹³ This opens the possibility that they may either have remembered it incorrectly, or were willing to write free variations on the text when making graffiti, using pious phrases from the Qur'ān in what seemed ways appropriate to the writers' circumstances at the moment.⁹⁴ The existence of variants of this kind, in other words, hardly

⁹²Nevo, "Towards a Prehistory of Islam."

⁹³See *EI* 2, "Al-Ḳur'ān," Part I: "Etymology and Synonyms" (A.T. Welch), for general discussion of the meaning of *qur'ān*; also Graham, "The Original Meaning of 'Qur'ān.'"

⁹⁴See, for example, inscription W1 from al-Ḥanākīya, near Medina, where the writer has made a slight change in the wording of Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3): 67, which

provides reason to assume that the Qur'ān text had not yet assumed stable form.

The inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, which closely follow but are not identical in all respects to passages in the Qur'ān, have also been used by some to question the stability of the Qur'ānic text at the time of the Dome's construction.⁹⁵ The most recent analysis of this phenomenon, however, suggests that the disparities are "minor textual variations... introduced to fit the sense," and in no way lend support to Wansbrough's hypothesis of a late date for the Qur'ān's codification; moreover, it argues that broader patterns of inscriptional evidence suggest that the traditional Muslim view, that the Qur'ān was codified during the caliphate of 'Uthmān, is reliable.⁹⁶

A copy of the Qur'ān recently discovered in Yemen may provide decisive proof of the early date of the Qur'ān. Preliminary descriptions of the manuscript suggest that it may be as old as the first century AH—which, if substantiated, would flatly disprove at least Wansbrough's thesis on the date of the Qur'ān. This document has not yet been fully published,⁹⁷ however, and significant doubt about its early date has been raised.⁹⁸ We must, then, await full publication based on careful investigation of this important find before we can draw firm conclusions about it.

refers to Abraham, in order to put the passage in the first person, so it would apply to himself. This inscription is probably datable to the first or very early second centuries AH. See Donner, "Some Early Arabic Inscriptions," 185.

⁹⁵E.g. Cook and Crone, *Hagarism*, 18, 167 n. 18.

⁹⁶Whelan, "Forgotten Witness." I am indebted to Dr. Whelan for making a draft of this article available to me prior to its publication.

⁹⁷In the meantime, see the brief preliminary description in Graf von Bothmer, "Meisterwerke islamischer Buchkunst: Koranische Kalligraphie und Illumination im Handschriftenfund aus der Großen Moschee in Sanaa."

⁹⁸Whelan, "Writing the Word of God," 120–21.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY ISLAMIC PIETY

Qur'ānic Piety

Like all scriptures, the Qur'ān includes a great diversity of material and touches on many themes. Its contents can be classified, on grounds of form and content, into three main categories.¹ The first of these, which we can call paraenetic, consists of ecstatic exhortations, usually cast in the form of a series of short, strikingly rhymed phrases called *saj'*, which are often imbued with powerful imagery. Usually these passages warn the hearer of the impending Last Judgment and enjoin him to believe in God and to do various kinds of good works, such as caring for the poor, widowed, or orphaned. Typical are the following:

1. In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: the Calamity! What is the Calamity? And what will make you understand what the Calamity is? A day [when] people shall be like scattered moths, and the mountains be like puffy wool. He whose scales are heavy (i.e. with good deeds) shall be in a pleasant life; but he whose scales are light shall be embraced by the pit.² What will make you understand what it is? It is a burning fire.³

¹Muslim exegetes have traditionally divided the Qur'ān's contents into five categories, according to their function: 1) verses that confirm the sending of the Prophet, 2) verses that contain the beliefs of Islam, 3) verses that deal with historical events, 4) verses that describe various things or events, and 5) legislative verses. See Hasan and Waheed, *Introduction to the Study of Islam*, 61, cited in Antes, "Schriftverständnis im Islam," 180.

²Lit. "his mother [is] the pit."

³Sūrat al-Qāri'a (101).

2. In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: Have you seen him who denies the Last Judgment? He is the one who ignores the orphan, and is not moved to feed the miserable. Woe to those praying who are inattentive in their prayer, those who make a show [to be seen] but who withhold a pittance.⁴

The second kind of material contained in the Qur'ān can be called legal, for it spells out, sometimes in considerable detail, particular relationships among members of the community of Believers—husbands and wives, masters and slaves, transgressors and victims, etc. These verses sometimes stipulate the exact punishment to be exacted for a particular offense, or the procedure to be followed in certain social situations. The following verses are typical:

1. If a woman fears abuse or avoidance by her husband, it is no sin for them to come to a settlement between them, for a settlement is best. Human souls are touched by greed, but if you do good works and are God-fearing [that would be better for you], for verily God is cognizant of what you do.⁵
2. God has charged you [thus] regarding your children: the male shall receive the like of the share of two females; and if they [that inherit] are women more than two [in number], they shall have two-thirds of what he left behind. If she was one, she shall have one-half. Each of the parents [of the deceased] shall have a sixth of what he left behind, if he had a child; if he had no child, his father shall inherit from him and his mother shall have a third. If he had brothers, his mother shall have a sixth, after [payment of] any bequest he may have made or any debt. Your fathers and your sons—you do not comprehend which of them is nearer to you in benefit. An ordinance from God; verily God is Knowing, Wise.⁶
3. A Believer has no right to kill [another] Believer, except by accident. Whoever kills a Believer by accident shall free a Believing

⁴Or simply "alms." Sūrat al-Mā'ūn (107).

⁵Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 128.

⁶Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 11.

slave and hand over blood money to [the victim's] family, unless they grant it as alms. If [the victim] was a Believer from a group at enmity with you, the freeing of a Believing slave [suffices].⁷ If he was from a group with which you had a covenant, blood money handed over to his family and freeing a Believing slave [are required]. Whoever does not find [the means to pay] shall fast two consecutive months as a penance from God. God is Knowing, Wise.⁸

This legal material, however, also includes some verses that address mainly the Believer's relationship with God, rather than his relationship to other Believers. Many passages, for example, prescribe aspects of ritual to be followed in worship. Breaking such rules would essentially constitute an infraction against God, rather than directly against other members of the community, but since the community was conceived as a community of Believers in God, an infraction against Him was in some sense one against the cohesion of the community as well. Typical of such ritual injunctions are the following:

1. Perform the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) at the setting of the sun until the dark of night, and the recitation of the dawn. Verily the recitation of the dawn is witnessed. And keep a vigil in part of the night as an extra duty for yourself, perhaps your Lord will resurrect you to a commendable station.⁹
2. The month of Ramaḍān, in which the Qur'ān was sent down as guidance for mankind and as proofs of the guidance and the *furqān*.¹⁰ So whosoever of you witnesses the month [of Ramaḍān], let him fast. He who is ill or on a voyage [should fast] a [like] number of [other] days. God wants ease for you, He does not want it to be hard for you. Complete the [appointed] number [of days of fasting] and glorify God for guiding you; perhaps you shall give thanks.¹¹

⁷I.e. no blood money is required.

⁸Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 92.

⁹Sūrat al-Isrā' (17): 78–79.

¹⁰The meaning of this word has been much debated by Muslim exegetes and modern scholars; for a review of proposed meanings, see *EI* ², "Furqān" (R. Paret).

¹¹Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 184.

The third kind of material contained in the Qur'ān can be called narrative—or perhaps more appropriately, anecdotal, because, as many have pointed out, Qur'ānic narration is often very disjointed.¹² This category includes stories, or more commonly parts of stories, about a variety of figures from the past, including individuals familiar from the Old and New Testaments, such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Jesus, and many others, as well as stories about persons not known from other scriptures: Dhū l-Qarnayn (usually identified with Alexander), the so-called “Arabian prophets” Ṣāliḥ and Hūd, etc.

Despite its diversity of content and form, however, the Qur'ān delivers one essential message to the hearer: that mankind should be pious.¹³ Over and over, and in diverse ways, it hammers home the ideas that mankind must believe in one God, that God is the creator of everything, that mere humans are as nothing beside Him; that mankind must fear God, fear the impending Judgment, and do good to other men, especially to other Believers:

1. GOD it was who raised the heavens without visible supports. Then He mounted the throne and forced the sun and the moon to serve Him, each running for a specified term. He regulates [every]

¹²E.g. Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 42–44. We shall see shortly what underlies this “disjointedness” in the Qur'ān (below, 80–85). The distinction between “narrative” and “anecdote” I see as follows: a *narrative* is an autonomous telling of an actual or supposed sequence of related events, which by itself conveys to listeners a sense not only of “what happened,” but also of its significance, which is usually moral. An *anecdote*, on the other hand, describes a single episode or event that illustrates a larger (and often only implicit) moral or evaluative issue (the “point”); anecdotes are not autonomous, but can only be understood in the context of the narrative and/or moral framework within which they exist. Biblical scholars frequently use the term “pericope” more or less in the sense in which I use anecdote, to mean a fragment of a larger story.

¹³Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, 1, speaks of the “essentially paraenetic character” of the Qur'ān. Piety, for our purposes, shall be defined as religious obedience—which, in Qur'ānic terms, means submission (*islām*) to God's revealed law for man: belief in one God and in the Last Judgment, performance of basic ritual duties—prayer, fasting, almsgiving, etc.—and conducting one's life in a righteous and modest manner. For a discussion of the semantic range of one of the key Qur'ānic terms, *taqwā* = “pious fear [of God],” see Ringgren, “Die Gottesfurcht im Koran;” Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 234–39.

matter.¹⁴ He sets out [His] signs in full clarity, so that perhaps you may be convinced of meeting your Lord. He it is who laid out the earth and set in it towering mountains and flowing rivers. Of all the fruiting plants He created two partners. He spread the cover of night over the day. Verily in all of this are signs for those who reflect.¹⁵

2. [God] has brought you everything you have asked, and if you counted God's blessings they would be incalculable; but mankind is unjust and ungrateful.¹⁶
3. Profit diverts you, even [when] you visit the graveyards; but you shall learn.¹⁷
4. When the heavens are sundered, when the stars fall, when the seas are exploded, when the graves are scattered about—then a soul shall know what it has done in good time and what it has put off.¹⁸
5. Mankind goes too far to think he is master of himself; for indeed the returning is to God.¹⁹
6. The righteous person is whoever Believes in God and the Last Day, in the angels and the book and the prophets; who gives [his] wealth, despite his love for it, to relatives, orphans, the destitute, the traveler, beggars, and for [the ransoming of] slaves; and who performs the ritual prayer and pays the alms....²⁰
7. [True] servants of the Merciful One are those who walk on the earth humbly, and when the ignorant address them, say "Peace;" and those who spend the night prostrate in adoration and rising

¹⁴*yudabbiru l-amra*. The implication is that God orders all worldly happenings, but the sense might also be: "He prepares the Last Judgment."

¹⁵*Sūrat al-Ra'd* (13): 2-3.

¹⁶*Sūrat Ibrāhīm* (14): 34.

¹⁷*Sūrat al-Takāthur* (102): 1-3.

¹⁸*Sūrat al-Infītār* (82): 1-5.

¹⁹*Sūrat al-'Alaq* (96): 6-8.

²⁰*Sūrat al-Baqara* (2): 177.

up for their Lord; and who say: "Lord, turn from us the torment of hell. . . ." ²¹

The terrors of Judgment cannot be avoided. You cannot hide your evil deeds, for God knows all, even your most secret thoughts; He is, to use the Qur'ān's eloquent phrase, "closer to you than your jugular vein." ²²

1. Dominion shall be His on the day when the trumpet is sounded, knowing what is hidden and what is plain. He is Wise, Omniscient. ²³
2. Whoever does an evil deed will be punished for it; he shall find for himself neither friend nor defender besides God. But whoever, being a Believer, does some good deeds—both males and females—they will enter the garden and shall not be harmed one whit. ²⁴

Mankind is eternally faced with this moral choice between the good (= gratitude for God's blessings and obedience to God's commands) and the evil (= disbelief, disobedience, and ingratitude):

You will see the sinners terrified at what they have earned as it befalls them; but those who have Believed and done good works [shall be] in the gardens of paradise, enjoying whatever they desire in the presence of their Lord. . . . ²⁵

The Qur'ānic emphasis on piety and morality thus informs and dominates each of the three different forms of Qur'ānic material we have described above—the paraenetic, legal, and anecdotal. The paraenetic material of the Qur'ān can be seen as direct exhortations to piety and morality; the legal material as attempts to define more clearly the exact meaning of piety in particular situations; and the anecdotal material as

²¹Sūrat al-Furqān (25): 63–65.

²²Sūrat Qāf (50): 16, with change in person of pronouns.

²³Sūrat al-An'ām (6): 72.

²⁴Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 123–24.

²⁵Sūrat al-Shūrā (42): 22.

examples of pious (or impious) deeds from the past, as acted out by individuals who are portrayed as ideal types or paradigms for imitation.²⁶

Piety was not, of course, a concept unknown in the Near East in Muḥammad's day. Diverse forms of piety had been an important feature of life in philosophical circles and in most religious communities of the Near East and Mediterranean world during the centuries before Islam.²⁷ Late antique Christian piety, which has been the most intensively studied by modern scholarship, was marked by powerful ascetic tendencies. The most sensational practitioners of this ascetic regimen subjected themselves to extremes of bodily mortification and self-denial, rooted in the concept that all earthly desires were but snares that endangered the soul's eventual chances for salvation by making the individual less mindful of God. Sexual desire was strictly controlled or suppressed (in some cases, even by self-castration). Eating and sleeping were considered necessary evils, and were reduced to the minimum needed to sustain life; food was taken in small quantities chosen for its unsavory qualities, and sleep was given up in exchange for long vigils in prayer. Even normal social contact was abandoned in the solitary, dour pursuit of spiritual salvation; being a hermit also offered the advantage that one could almost completely forego clothing and shelter, those well-known lures to vanity and complacent comfort.²⁸ Along with

²⁶Bell, "Muhammad and Previous Messengers," 330, points out that Muḥammad saw the experience of earlier messengers and prophets as analogous to his own, and "sometimes read his own experience back into these stories." Even in this case, however, the prophets are examples to be imitated—in this instance, by Muḥammad himself.

²⁷The best concise overviews of late antique religiosity are Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 96–112; Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, 71–75. The availability of Christian liturgical and other writings in Arabic was surveyed by Baumstark, "Das Problem eines vorislamischen christlichen-kirchlichen Schrifttums in arabischer Sprache."

²⁸On early eastern Christian piety, two classic older works are Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, and Chitty, *The Desert a City*. In recent years there has been a veritable explosion of literature on late antique asceticism, apparently sparked by Brown's perceptive studies on the "holy man" (see below, 71 n. 30). See also Brown, *The Body and Society*; Elm, *Virgins of God*, which illuminates the rich diversity of late antique asceticism in Anatolia and Egypt; some of the studies in Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*; Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*. Asceticism among Coptic Christians is the particular focus of MacDer-

the asceticism came an emphasis on rigorous observance of ritual, especially prayer; even as their filthy bodies wasted away, these "spiritual athletes" built up their souls through unceasing prayer that included repeated deep bowings and prostrations and repetitive chanting.²⁹ Not all late antique Christians observed the ascetic ideal to this degree, of course, but the few holy men who did were widely revered as the true champions of Christian religiosity, and for this reason sometimes acquired profound influence not only with the unlettered masses, but also with those of power, wealth, and education.³⁰

This tendency toward asceticism and ritual rigor appears to have affected most late antique religious communities, not just Christians,³¹ but less is known about them. The small and dwindling communities of late antique pagans inherited a well-developed ascetic tradition from the paganism of Graeco-Roman antiquity.³² Manichaeism and other forms of late antique Gnosis preserved a strong ascetic tradition; gnostic

mot, *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East*; also Rousseau, *Pachomius*, and Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*. An illuminating Coptic source in relation to later Qur'anic and Islamic notions of piety is edited and translated by Crum, "Discours de Pisenhius sur Saint Onnophrius," e.g. 61 (on women veiling, limiting adornment, and showing modesty), 65 (on avoiding fornication by marriage). (Pisentius d. 632 CE).

²⁹John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, which describes prayer vigils among the "Amidene Converts," PO, XVIII, 609–12; in *ibid.*, 564–67 ("Life of Malkha"); in *ibid.*, 627 ("Mare the Solitary"). See also George of the Arabs, "An Exposition of the Mysteries of the Church," in Connolly and Codrington, *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy*, 19, on "bowing down to the ground," "bending the knee." Note, however, that George d. 724 CE. On prostration as an expression of repentance and inner sorrow (Greek *metanoia*) in Christian ritual, see Ward, trans., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, xvi–xvii (in Glossary). On genuflection and prostration in prayers in Egypt, see St. John Cassian (d. 435), *De institutiones Coenobiorum*, 23–24 (= Book II.7); also *Coptic Encyclopaedia*, "Genuflection" (Archbishop Basilios); Khs-Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, index s.v. "prostration."

³⁰The work of Peter Brown first situated these figures, formerly studied mainly by specialists in church history, in the mainstream of late antique social history. For the Near East, see especially his studies "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," and "Town, Village and Holy Man: the Case of Syria."

³¹On Jewish piety, which may have been the exception, see below, 72 n. 36.

³²On pagan piety: Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, Chapter 3, on asceticism among "divine sages," and Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society."

communities of the Near East varied widely in their ritual practices, but ritual prayer seems to have been an important cultic element for many.³³ Reference in some gnostic hymns to “bending the knees in deep veneration” suggests that physical movements such as prostration were an integral part of gnostic prayers.³⁴ Zoroastrian practice in this period is even harder to uncover, since most Zoroastrian religious texts date from Islamic times, but Zoroastrianism’s deep concern for ritual purity is well-established.³⁵ The only major religious community that seems to have stood apart from this late antique yearning for ascetic piety was the Jews. Although the Qumrān community of the first century CE did show ascetic tendencies, by late antique times Jewish piety seems to have aimed at the affirmation of life led in obedience to the Torah. Jews considered withdrawal from the human community as aberrant, not pious, behavior; righteousness in Judaism consisted especially of thorough knowledge of the Torah. The *zaddikim* were known for their mystical communion with God, rather than knowledge of the Torah, but they did not represent the mainstream of Jewish religiosity.³⁶

Qur’ānic piety continued these late antique traditions of piety, even if it went its own ways on some issues; and to some extent the Qur’ān’s injunctions to piety must have been understood by Believers in terms of these familiar norms, even as it helped modify and reshape them

³³See Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 23–24; Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 218–25. The Nag Hammadi gnostic texts emphasize piety and renunciation of worldly passions; e.g. *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, 279–81 (opening of “The Teachings of Silvanus,” probably early third century CE).

³⁴Note the hymn in praise of the Bema, opening verse, in Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road*, 137.

³⁵See Choksy, *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism*, especially 53–62 on the *pādyāb* ritual; Choksy, 60–62, notes the close parallels between this ritual and Muslim ritual purity practices. See also Nigosian, *The Zoroastrian Faith*, esp. 98–118.

³⁶See “Piety and the Pious,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, XIII, 505–506 (Walter S. Würzburger). The discourse of the body in late antique Judaism—so different from that in Christianity, as explored by Brown, *The Body and Society*—is examined in Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*. (I am grateful to Marion H. Katz for this reference.) See also Fraade, “Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism,” which warns against an overly simplistic notion of asceticism and elucidates the tensions in the Judaic tradition regarding it.

through its own distinctive elements.³⁷ To note briefly but a few obvious examples, the Qur'ān's emphasis on regular worship of God through prayer rituals that involved bowings and prostrations, and its commands to the Believers to guard their chastity and to dress modestly, were both familiar themes in some Christian communities on the eve of Islam. Marūthā (d. 649 CE), the bishop of Takrīt in central Iraq, and his followers were famed for their asceticism, lengthy fasts, night vigils, meditations, and frequent kneelings and prostrations during prayer. Marūthā also "dressed women in chastity, modesty, and humility, by making them wear veils and commanding them to tie up their hair—these very ones who beforehand had been naked and exposed, lacking honor. . . ."³⁸ The hyperbolic description of unveiled women as "naked" reveals the potent force of this Christian pietism, a spirit that was taken up by Islamic piety. On the other hand, the Qur'ān definitely parts company with the Christian ascetics in certain respects; in contrast to their self-starvation, intentional eating of barely edible foods, deprivation of sleep, and denial of social and sexual contact, the Qur'ān offers the view that the material pleasures of life were also created by God for mankind to enjoy, as long as that enjoyment did not become an end in itself and obscure the Believer's awareness of the ultimate source of those blessings and the purpose of life—God, and the worship of Him:³⁹

1. For mankind He set down the earth, with its fruits and budding palms, grain in the ear and aromatic plants. Therefore, which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?⁴⁰

³⁷Although old, and perhaps overemphasizing the influence of Christianity, the best discussion of this is still in two works of Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum," and *In the Garden of Myrtles*, especially Chapters 1 and 2. Parallels between Qur'ānic injunctions regarding prayer and prayer practices among Jews and, especially, Christians, is examined by Baumstark, "Jüdischer und christlicher Gebetstypus im Koran."

³⁸Denhā, "Histoire de Maroutha," 87 (on prayer), 84 (on veiling). Denhā, who was Marūthā's successor as maphrian or Metropolitan of Takrit, died ca. 660 CE.

³⁹This suggests that the Qur'ān embraces an anti-gnostic philosophy, since in gnostic thought all aspects of the "lower" world were merely snares designed to entrap the soul.

⁴⁰Sūrat al-Rahmān (55): 10–13.

2. We have sent down from the heavens blessed water, with which We make spring forth gardens and the harvest grain, and lofty palms with fruited spikes, as provision for [Our] servants. . . .⁴¹
3. Let mankind contemplate his food. Verily, We have poured forth rain, then plowed the earth in furrows, and made spring forth in it grain and grapes, vegetables and olives, palms, luxuriant gardens and lush meadows, as a delight for you and your cattle.⁴²

Marriage and sexual relations are mentioned in the Qur'ān as normal features of life; they are certainly to be regulated, but not suppressed.⁴³ Where the Christian or Manichaean ascetics of late antiquity strove for piety by shunning this world, in other words, the Qur'ān enjoins piety within the context of this world.⁴⁴

But, the Qur'ān's localization of piety in this world has further implications. For the Qur'ān goes beyond simply enjoining Believers to be pious; it also urges them to adopt an activist or militant stance with regard to piety. It is not enough for the Believer quietly to do good works in this world or to lose himself in pious thoughts of the world to come; the Believer must also try to intervene to stop evil in the world around him. He should both encourage others to be pious, and be courageous in confronting unbelief and sinful behavior when he encounters it, even if doing so makes him obnoxious to others. This activist or militant tendency is neatly summed up in the Qur'ānic phrase "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil" (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*),⁴⁵ which developed, in the generations following the death of Muḥammad, into a kind of catch-phrase enshrining the pious ideal among Believers.⁴⁶ Out of this imperative to militant piety and prac-

⁴¹Sūrat Qāf (50): 9–11.

⁴²Sūrat 'Abasa (80): 24–32.

⁴³Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): 20–25 is one of several passages that regulate marriage and sexuality. See also Sūrat al-Nūr (24): 32–33; Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 187. Andrae, "Zuhd und Mönchtum," and *idem*, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 44–50, deal with later Islamic mystics of the first–second centuries AH, not (or not mainly) with the Qur'ān.

⁴⁴In this respect, Islamic piety resembled Jewish piety.

⁴⁵Variations of this phrase occur at least a dozen times in the Qur'ān; e.g. Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3): 104; Sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 157; Sūrat Luqmān (31): 17.

⁴⁶Michael Cook is currently engaged in a study of this theme in Islamic tradition.

tical intervention in the affairs of this world flowed also, of course, the injunctions to “striving (or “fighting”) in the way of God (*jihād fi sabīl Allāh*):”

Those Believers who hold back⁴⁷—except those in distress—are not equal to those who strive in God’s way with their property and themselves. God has set those who strive with their property and themselves a degree over those who hold back. God has promised all [Believers] a happy ending, but God has favored those who struggle over those who hold back with a great reward.⁴⁸

The emphasis on being godly and God-fearing thus appears in the Qur’ān in many guises, and is such a persistent theme that we must conclude it to have been the very essence of Muḥammad’s message. It is far more prevalent, for example, than any emphasis on Muḥammad’s role as prophet,⁴⁹ although that is also present. To judge from the Qur’ān, then, Islam began as a movement of uncompromising, indeed militant, piety, perhaps initially inspired by Muḥammad’s fear that the Last Judgment was imminent.⁵⁰

The Qur’ān and History

The Qur’ān’s overwhelming concern for piety bears a number of interesting consequences, some of which are directly related to the emergence of historical writing in the later Islamic community. One of these is that most nuances of personality in the characters that populate the Qur’ān’s narrations are bleached out, because its focus on morality is so intense. The only judgment about a person that really matters, in the Qur’ānic view, is whether he or she is good or evil, and most characters presented in the Qur’ānic narratives fall squarely on one side or other

⁴⁷*al-qā‘idūn*, literally “the sitters.”

⁴⁸*Sūrat al-Nisā’* (4): 95; see also *Sūrat al-Tawba* (9): 19–20.

⁴⁹I will return later to this point, which I take to be of no little significance.

⁵⁰The idea that the Qur’ān presented an apocalyptic eschatology was first stressed by Casanova, *Mahomet et la fin du monde* (1911–24). Most subsequent writers, including Andrae, “Die Ursprung des Islams,” and Wensinck, “Muhammad und die Propheten,” have been more comfortable with a non-apocalyptic understanding of Qur’ānic eschatology. See more recently Conrad, “Portents of the Hour.”

of that great divide.⁵¹ More often than not, it gives us "ideal types," with little suggestion that a single personality might be a mixture of good and evil impulses in constant tension.⁵² Moreover, it conveys no sense that the tension itself, being uniquely human, is of special interest. That is, there is little appreciation of the human moral struggle in its own right; there is only concern for its outcome. Hence one finds in the Qur'ān no sympathy for the sinner as someone succumbing, against his own best interests in the long run, to all-too-human impulses in the face of overwhelming temptation, despite perhaps valiant efforts to resist temptation. Rather, the Qur'ān portrays humanity in a strictly polarized way. Those who are good are not only pious, but usually pious in all ways; they believe, are humble before God and mankind, do good works, and truly repent for any sins that may have overtaken them before they saw the light of true belief and the necessity of pious obedience. Evildoers, on the other hand, are simply "the losers" (*al-khāsirūn*),⁵³ who have fallen short in their beliefs or obedience to God, and are to be disdained and hated for their failure to repent and "see the light:"

Those who Believe know that [a parable given by God] is the truth from their Lord, whereas the unbelievers say: "What did God mean by this parable?" By it God deceives many, and guides many. But He deceives only the iniquitous, who violate God's pledge after contracting it, and sever what

⁵¹See also Jomier, *The Bible and the Koran*, 49. K. Kueny has observed that, in its depiction of a sharp dichotomy between good and evil, the Qur'ān resembles Zoroastrianism and gnostic movements, such as Manichaeism (personal communication).

⁵²See Cook, *Muhammad*, 32, on the Qur'ānic representation of the Prophet conforming to "a stereotyped conception of a monotheist messenger." But the question of ideal types is more generally applicable in the Qur'ān; see Busse, "Herrscher-typen im Qur'ān," on "ideal types" of rulers, prophets, and opponents in the Qur'ān; Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān;" Kueny, *A Drink of Many Colors*, 68–75. The tendency to "idealize" the subjects of religious biography was already current in late antiquity; see Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity;" Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 34–35; Sartran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine*, 97–105.

⁵³On this term in the Qur'ān, see Torrey, *Commercial-Theological Terms in the Koran*, 30–32.

God has ordered to be joined, and spread wickedness on the earth. These are the losers.⁵⁴

Viewing humanity through this lens, there can be no “noble failures;” all failures, in Qur’ānic discourse, are ignominious. God may be compassionate, merciful, and forgiving, but in its portrayal of individual characters the Qur’ān does not particularly encourage others to be so, tending rather to encourage a judgmental and intolerant attitude toward anyone who might be seen as an evildoer.

As an example of this tendency to see humanity in polarized, moral terms, we may examine aspects of the story of Joseph and his brothers as it occurs in the Qur’ān. As we shall see, the Qur’ānic Joseph (as well as his father) is dehumanized—that is, he is presented as being so perfect that he is no longer credible as a human figure; however, this fact stands out more clearly if we consider it against the background of the way Joseph is presented in the Old Testament.⁵⁵ In the Biblical version, Joseph’s humanness—that is, his human weakness—is evident at many moments,⁵⁶ but none more clearly than in the episodes in which, as governor of Egypt, he interviews his own half-brothers without their realizing who he really is.⁵⁷ During the first interview, when he tests his half-brothers by demanding that they go back to Canaan and return

⁵⁴Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 27–28. There are over 30 other passages in which “the losers” are mentioned.

⁵⁵In making this comparison, I do not mean to suggest that one version of the Joseph story is “better” than the other—only that the two versions differ from one another in their portrayal of humanity, and that seeing the differences can help us to understand the essential literary and conceptual qualities of each. Nor is the purpose of the comparison to denigrate one version as being merely “derived” from the other; rather, it will simply show that each uses the Joseph story in distinctly different ways for distinctly different purposes. For an excellent analysis of the subtlety, richness, and effectiveness of the Qur’ānic Joseph story as a piece of drama, see Johns, “The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story.” The Qur’ānic Joseph story has been repeatedly analyzed by Western scholars. See, among others, the following: Stern, “Muhammad and Joseph;” Waldman, “New Approaches to ‘Biblical’ Materials in the Qur’ān;” Jomier, “Joseph vendu par ses frères dans la Génèse et le Coran;” Johns, “Joseph in the Qur’ān;” MacDonald, “Joseph in the Qur’ān and Muslim Commentary;” and the early, but still informative, examination in Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, 187–224.

⁵⁶Cf. Jomier, “Joseph vendu par ses frères,” 349.

⁵⁷Genesis 42–45.

bringing their youngest brother (Joseph's full brother, Benjamin), holding Simeon hostage until their return, Joseph cannot take the emotional strain, and "he turned away from them and wept."⁵⁸ During the second meeting, when the brothers have returned with Benjamin, Joseph plays the trick of hiding his silver cup in Benjamin's baggage and then sending his men to "discover" the missing cup, upon which he demands that Benjamin remain behind as his slave because of the "theft." Since the half-brothers had only with the greatest difficulty persuaded their father Jacob to let Benjamin make the trip at all, due to his fear that evil should befall Benjamin while in their care (just as it had once befallen his brother Joseph), Judah pleads with Joseph to hold him as slave instead and let Benjamin return, for "when [my father] sees that the lad is not with us, he will die; and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol." This is simply too much for Joseph, who breaks down in tears openly before his brothers, finally revealing his identity to them.⁵⁹

In the Qur'ānic version, Joseph not only does not break down, he is even capable of sending his brothers back to their father a second time while holding the second son hostage; he has superhuman strength, rooted in his belief in God. The human element of filial and fraternal affection, which in the Biblical version overcomes Joseph's determination to test (and, in a sense, to get even with) his half-brothers, is not operative in the Qur'ānic Joseph, who has no such merely human weakness. This gives the Qur'ānic version of the story a certain air of inevitability regarding the outcome, because Joseph, who is an exemplar of belief and goodness, would of course never be swayed by human affection for his half-brothers, who are evil. Compared with the Biblical version, there is in the Qur'ānic version an air of inevitability, and less of a sense that things might have worked out differently.⁶⁰

Joseph's father Jacob (curiously, never mentioned by name as the father of Joseph in the Qur'ānic account) also shows superhuman emotional control in the Qur'ānic version. In the Biblical version, when Joseph's half-brothers return to their father with the tale that Joseph

⁵⁸Genesis 42:24.

⁵⁹Genesis 44-45.

⁶⁰I am indebted to Kathryn M. Kueny for this insight.

had been devoured by wild beasts, Jacob simply believes their story and mourns:

“It is my son’s robe; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.” Then Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned his son for many days. All his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said: “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.⁶¹

In the Qur’ānic version, Jacob’s behavior stands in sharp contrast to the emotional pathos of the Biblical account:

They came to their father that night weeping, saying: “Father, we went out to race each other, leaving Joseph with our baggage; whereupon the wolf devoured him. But you will not believe us, even though we are truthful.” And they had put false blood on [Joseph’s] shirt. [But] he said: “Nay, rather you have let yourselves be seduced into something. Sweet patience! God is [my] Helper against what you say.”⁶²

Noteworthy is the absence of any description of feelings on Jacob’s part; the Qur’ān depicts him not as a man in emotional pain, but as one who is clairvoyant; he knows that the brothers are up to no good, but accepts this with resignation as God’s design—the perfect Believer or “good man.” Again, the tone of inevitability in the story is evident here. The Qur’ān, in its single-minded concern that the episode serve as a lesson in true Belief, plays down any hint that Jacob might display human weakness in such a situation.⁶³

⁶¹Genesis 37: 33–35.

⁶²Sūrat Yūsuf (12): 17–18.

⁶³Human feelings are not completely absent in the Qur’ān’s depiction of Jacob; later in the story, when the brothers return with the news that Benjamin is being held for theft, Jacob does speak of his grief—for Joseph. But he quickly returns to his stolid trust in God: see Johns, “Quranic Presentation,” 63. See also Johns, “Joseph in the Qur’ān,” 39–40, who notes that Jacob’s grief is accompanied by, and tempered by, “his total trust in God;” see *ibid.*, 40: “...in the Genesis

Another consequence of the Qur'ān's intense focus on morality and piety—and one most significant for our present purposes—is that it adopts a profoundly ahistorical view of the world and of mankind.⁶⁴ The very concept of history is fundamentally irrelevant to the Qur'ān's concerns, because all people have been, and will be, confronted with the same eternal moral choice—the choice between good and evil, with the guidance of the revelation and of the prophets as the criteria provided by God for choosing. Since the moral choice is presented as eternal, the question of historical change is of no importance to the Qur'ān.⁶⁵ The Qur'ān's outlook is historical only in the very general sense that man is seen to exist between two definite points in time, the Creation and the Last Judgment.

This ahistorical view of the world is most clearly visible in the anecdotal or narrative passages of the Qur'ān, where one would most expect an historical viewpoint to prevail. We should perhaps begin by observing that the Qur'ān in fact contains mainly episodes or fragments of narratives, not complete narratives themselves—the main exception being the Joseph story, which does form a coherent narrative in the Qur'ān. Generally, however, the stories making up the Qur'ān's "narrative" ma-

telling... Jacob cannot believe that his son is alive... , whereas in the Qur'ān Jacob cannot really accept that his son is dead, and is continually abused for his 'old delusion.' See also Jomier, "Joseph vendu par ses frères," 343.

⁶⁴This assertion contradicts the attitude of many who have spoken of Muḥammad's or the Qur'ān's "historical consciousness:" e.g. Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 24–28; *idem*, "The Influence of Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography;" Obermann, "Early Islam;" Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam*, 28: the Qur'ān is "a deeply historical work." Khalidi seems to temper this position, at least implicitly, in his *Arabic Historical Thought*, 7–13, for while speaking of the Qur'ān's "vision of history" he repeatedly emphasizes its repetitiveness, use of an "eternal present," and use of stories as moral exemplars or paradigms. Braune, "Historical Consciousness in Islam," argues that the Qur'ān brings to Muslim society a sense of history. It seems to me, on the contrary, that the Believers came to a sense of history only by *overriding* the Qur'ān's ahistorical point of view.

⁶⁵See Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," 5: "The Qur'ān contains very little narrated history." Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies*, 1, expresses in his distinctive way the same observation: "Analysis of Qur'ānic application of these [monotheistic images] shows that they have been adapted to the essentially paraenetic character of that document, and that, for example, originally narrative material was reduced almost invariably to a series of discrete and parabolic utterances." See also *Qur'ānic Studies*, 29.

terial are so fragmented that the narrative can only be reconstructed by piecing together scattered bits. In some cases, even this does not produce a coherent narrative; sometimes a fuller version is known from other sources, such as the Old Testament, but in other instances we lack extra-Qur'ānic sources to rely on, so that the fuller contours of the narrative remain obscure—for example, the stories of Hūd and Šāliḥ. Even where narrative material is present in the Qur'ān, the objective of the stories is not to place the particular episodes and people mentioned in any historical sequence of events, but rather to provide examples of the eternal moral choice between Belief and unbelief, good and evil.⁶⁶

The story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden provides us with a typical example; to appreciate the character of the Qur'ānic version, it is again useful to consider first the nature of the Old Testament version of the same story.⁶⁷ In Genesis, Adam and Eve sin by tasting the forbidden fruit, thereby disobeying God's command. But the episode also has several other symbolic dimensions. It functions as an allegory of the double-edged character of knowledge: eating of the tree of knowledge not only enabled Adam and Eve to realize that they were naked, but also enabled them to "be like God, knowing good and evil." The story also serves, in the Old Testament, as an explanation of human mortality, since Adam and Eve are driven from the garden by God specifically to ensure that they would not "take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever." It also provides an explanation for the human struggle for existence, in that God in His wrath says: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. . . ." In short, while the Biblical story of Adam and Eve does, of course, deal with the question of good vs. evil (obedience to God's word vs. disobedience), it also serves as the

⁶⁶See also Rippin, "Interpreting the Bible through the Qur'ān," esp. 250–52. Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Materials in the Qur'ān," 5: "Within the overall purposes of the Qur'ān, the Joseph story serves, like most other narrative therein, as a didactic vehicle. . . ."

⁶⁷Genesis 2–3. As noted above, my intention in making this comparison is to elucidate the central character of both versions, not to suggest that one is "superior" to the other.

beginning of a much longer and more complex story, that of mankind's earthly existence; moreover, it occupies a unique position in this longer story, explaining why human existence is as it is, full of toil and trouble, and ending with the ignominy of death.

The Qur'ānic version of Adam's fall also has Adam and Eve succumbing to the wiles of Satan, and disobeying God's command not to eat of the tree. But the disobedience is more blatant in the Qur'ānic version, because in it God is said to have told Adam not only not to approach the tree, but also to beware of Satan who was an open enemy.⁶⁸ More important, however, is the fact that the Qur'ānic version does not attempt to serve as an explanation of mortality or of human toil, for after God discovers that Adam had eaten of the tree He simply says: "Descend, some of you as enemies of the other; in earth shall be a place for you to reside, and necessities of life (or "objects of gratification, *mata'*") for a time."⁶⁹ Unlike the version in Genesis, then, where the rules for man are forever changed by the Fall, and where the story of Adam occupies a unique position in human history, the Qur'ānic version simply serves as one of many instances of human disobedience followed by punishment, and then of repentance leading to forgiveness by God. In its main purpose, it is thus indistinguishable from most other Qur'ānic narratives or anecdotes. From the point of view of Qur'ānic discourse, there is no reason why the story of Adam, Eve, and the Fall should occur near the beginning of the book—and, in fact, it does not.

Other "Biblical" narratives in the Qur'ān, such as those of Joseph, Jacob, Abraham, or Moses—or, for that matter, of Mary, Zachariah, and Jesus, or even of Pharaoh, as an anti-hero—receive similar treatment.⁷⁰ They are told by the Qur'ān not because they relate particular, unique episodes in the history of mankind or of a chosen people,

⁶⁸Sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 22.

⁶⁹Sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 24; Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 36.

⁷⁰A recent, detailed study of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in Biblical, Qur'ānic, and post-Qur'ānic versions provides an excellent example of how the Qur'ān makes its own points with a well-known story: see Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, esp. 38–42. Bell, "Muhammad and Previous Messengers," 333, briefly discusses the different goals of the Biblical and Qur'ānic versions of the Moses story.

but because they offer diverse examples illustrating the basic Qur'ānic truths: the good believe in God, are grateful to and obey Him, the evil are punished; the apostles or prophets are good and bring guidance to their followers, the unbelievers stumble to their own destruction. As the Qur'ān states toward the beginning of the Joseph story: "In [the story] of Joseph and his brothers are signs (*āyāt*) for those who seek."⁷¹ The fundamental role of the Joseph story in the Bible, namely to provide an explanation for the captivity or enslavement of Israel in Egypt, which was of course the necessary prelude to the story of their redemption from bondage and escape under the leadership of Moses, is ignored in the Qur'ānic version, because it is simply not relevant to the Qur'ān's purposes. The Old Testament stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, etc., form discrete and essential links in an historical progression that justifies the religious and political identity of the children of Israel: covenant, exile, redemption, revelation of the Law, etc. In the Qur'ān, on the other hand, all peoples have a prophet, and all prophets are equal, so the story of any one prophet is not really distinctive; the names change, but the lesson is the same. The Qur'ānic narrations do not come together in a progression to form the history of a chosen people, marked by particular and distinctive events, as in the Old Testament, but rather depict an eternal moral choice—the choice between good and evil, Belief and unbelief—faced by all people from Adam on in more or less the same form, and hence simply repeated generation after generation. The Qur'ān's placement of all prophets into one didactic basket is clearly visible in a passage such as this one:

We raise whom We will, by degrees; indeed your Lord is knowing and wise. To [Abraham] We gave Isaac and Jacob; all of them we guided; and Noah we had guided beforehand; and of his descendants, David, and Solomon, and Job, and Joseph, and Moses, and Aaron. Thus do we reward those who do good. And Zachariah, and John, and Jesus, and Elisha, all of them among the righteous; and Ishmael, and Elisha, and Jonas, and Lot; all of them we favored over the

⁷¹Sūrat Yūsuf (12): 7.

worlds; from their fathers and descendants and brothers we chose them, and we guided them to the straight path.⁷²

One gets the feeling from this passage that any of the seventeen different prophets it mentions could be left out, or any number of other prophets added, without changing its essential meaning in any way. The apostles and prophets are not, in the Qur'ānic presentation, successive links in a chain of historical evolution, each with a unique role in the story of the community's development, but merely repeated examples of an eternal truth, idealized models to be emulated. In Qur'ānic discourse, then, the prophets are essentially interchangeable.⁷³

The purpose of stories in the Qur'ān, then, is profoundly different from their purpose in the Old Testament; the latter uses stories to explain particular chapters in Israel's history, the former to illustrate—again and again—how the true Believer acts in certain situations. In line with this purpose, Qur'ānic characters are portrayed as moral paradigms, emblematic of all who are good or evil. Moreover, as stories, they are not imbued with much, if any, development—which is why they can appear as detached fragments. In this sense, the Qur'ān can be seen to be profoundly ahistorical; it is simply not concerned with history in the sense of development and change, either of the prophets or peoples before Muḥammad, or of Muḥammad himself, because in the Qur'ānic view the identity of the community to which Muḥammad was sent is not *historically* determined, but *morally* determined.

The Qur'ānic view of mankind and of salvation, then, is not historical, but essentially moral. In this respect it shows a certain similarity to the concepts found in the Arabic poetry of the pre-Islamic period, which also presented an essentially ahistorical and moral view of man

⁷²Sūrat al-An'ām (6): 83–87.

⁷³For a concise discussion of this theme, see Falatūri, "Experience of Time and History in Islam." See also Booth, "The Historical and the Non-Historical in Islam" (I am grateful to Sheryl Burkhalter for this reference); Siddiqi, *The Qur'ānic Concept of History*, esp. 52: "It is true that Qur'ān refers to some facts of religious and political history, but its concern is not with the facts themselves so much as with the moral to which they point." Also Jomier, "Joseph vendu par ses frères," 350: "For the Muslim, Jacob and Joseph are examples of the perfect Muslim." See also Newby, *Making of the Last Prophet*, 151. For a contrary view, see Obermann, "Early Islam," 267.

and the world, although the actual moral values projected are radically different from those of the Qur'ān, which emphasizes belief (*īmān*) and piety (*taqwā*), rather than the manly virtue (*murūwa*) and tribal chauvinism of pre-Islamic society.⁷⁴

Survival of the Pious Tradition

The strong concern for piety and morals visible in the Qur'ān, which I take to be evidence of the values prevailing in the earliest community of Believers, did not die out in the period following the death of Muḥammad and the codification of the Qur'ān. Rather, the pre-occupation with piety survived among the Believers, as can be seen clearly in both the available documentary evidence from the first century AH—inscriptions, papyri, etc.—and in the earliest non-Qur'ānic literary evidence from the Islamic tradition, which seems to have its roots in this period.⁷⁵ In the remainder of this section, we shall examine each category—documentary and literary evidence—in turn.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

The surviving unofficial inscriptions in Arabic from the first three-quarters of the first century AH—admittedly limited in number, but valuable nonetheless—contain mainly pious phrases, requests for divine forgiveness, emphatic declarations of God's oneness or uniqueness, and—rarely—quotes or paraphrases from the Qur'ān. Typical are the following:

1. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: This grave is for 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khayr al-Ḥujrī. O God, grant him forgiveness and make him enter Thy mercy, and we with him. When you read this inscription, ask for his forgiveness, and say

⁷⁴Cf. Obermann, "Early Islam," 265, who notes the Qur'ān's similarity to the old poetry in emotional intensity and rhetorical pathos. Goldziher, "Historiography in Arabic Literature," and "Islamisme et Parsisme," opines that the pre-Islamic Arabs had no sense of history.

⁷⁵The extant passages from this early literary material are preserved only in later works, however, and the dating of precise bits of tradition is a contentious business.

"Amen." This inscription was written in Jumāda II of the year 31 (April–May 652 CE).⁷⁶

2. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: God is most great. Much praise be to God in the morning, and in the late afternoon, and in the long night. O God, Lord of Gabriel and Michael and Isrāfīl,⁷⁷ grant forgiveness to Thābit ibn Yazīd al-Ash'arī for his past and future sins, and to whosoever says "Amen, Amen, Lord of the Worlds." This inscription was written in Shawwāl of the year 64 (May–June 684 CE).⁷⁸
3. May God grant forgiveness to Ḥakīm ibn 'Amr, alive and well.⁷⁹ Amen, Lord of the Worlds, Lord of all People. Written in the beginning of Dhū l-Hijja in the year 85 (early December 704). May He make him enter paradise. . . .⁸⁰

Hundreds more Arabic graffiti and private inscriptions have been published that, although undated, resemble those of dated inscriptions of the first and early second century AH palaeographically and in the phraseology used, and in many cases were found in association with the dated inscriptions. The great majority of them appeal for divine forgiveness and express hopes for entry into paradise.⁸¹ Their emphasis on this pious theme is so complete that hardly any other subject can be identified in them; they appear to confirm the idea that the early Believers were obsessed with personal piety.

"Official" inscriptions—that is, inscriptions made by the ruling group among the Believers—naturally include an expression of what

⁷⁶Hawary, "The Most Ancient Islamic Monument Known."

⁷⁷The angel who sounds the trumpet at the Last Judgment.

⁷⁸Al-Ṣandūq, "Hajar Ḥafnat al-'Ubayyid."

⁷⁹Lit., "not destroyed and not lost."

⁸⁰Nevo, Cohen, and Heftman, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions*, I, 36 (no. MA 4265(19)).

⁸¹Note especially Nevo, Cohen, and Heftman, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions*, which includes over 400 inscriptions; al-Rāshid, *Kitābāt islāmīya ghayr manshūra min Rawāwa*; Sharon, "Arabic Rock Inscriptions from the Negev;" Donner, "Some Early Arabic Inscriptions;" al-'Ushsh, "Kitābāt 'arabīya ghayr manshūra fi jabal Usays;" Grohmann, "Eine neue arabische Inschrift aus der ersten Hälfte des I. Jahrhunderts der Hīgra."

might be called political identity, but again the main emphasis in those discovered so far is piety. In some cases, the deed commemorated by the inscription is presented as an act of piety:

1. This dam belongs to the servant of God Mu'āwiya, commander of the Believers (*amīr al-mu'minīn*). The servant of God ibn Ṣakhr⁸² built it with God's permission in the year 58 (AH = 677–78 CE). O God, grant forgiveness to the servant of God Mu'āwiya, commander of the Believers, make him firm and assist him, and let him reap the benefit of it. 'Amr ibn Janāb (?) wrote [this].⁸³
2. . . . the servant of God 'Abd al-Malik, commander of the Believers, may the mercy of God be upon him, [ordered the construction] of this road and the fabrication of this milestone. From Damascus to this milestone is 109 miles.⁸⁴
3. 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān the *amīr* ordered [the construction of] this bridge. O God, bless him in all his affairs (*fī amrihi kullihi*) and make his sovereignty secure in accordance with Thy pleasure, and console him in himself and his following.⁸⁵ Amen. Sa'd Abū 'Uthmān undertook construction of it, and 'Abd al-Raḥmān wrote [this] in Ṣafar of the year 69 (AH = August–September 688 CE).⁸⁶

⁸²Another reference to Mu'āwiya himself; the proper name of Mu'āwiya's father, Abū Sufyān, was Ṣakhr.

⁸³Miles, "Early Arabic Inscriptions." See also the Greek inscription of AH 42/663 from Ḥammāt Gader, which commemorates the rebuilding of a hot bath to heal the sick by Mu'āwiya's Arab "counselor" or manager (?) of the town (Greek *symboylos*): Green and Tsafir, "Greek Inscriptions from Ḥammāt Gader."

⁸⁴RCÉA, no. 14; Clermont-Ganneau, *Récueil d'archéologie orientale*, I, 202. Cf. RCÉA, nos. 15–17, datable to 86/705 or earlier ('Abd al-Malik reigned 66–86/685–705).

⁸⁵*hashamihi*, "his servants, household, family."

⁸⁶RCÉA, no. 8. This inscription, from a bridge in Fustāt, is not extant and is known only from a quote in a much later literary work (al-Maqrīzī's *Khiṭaṭ*). In phrasing and vocabulary, however, it fits perfectly with known early inscriptions and lacks the features one might expect to find in a pious fraud of later date, such as extensive Qur'ānic quotations or references to the Prophet Muḥammad and his family. I am, therefore, inclined to accept this quotation as an accurate transcription

The pious content of these inscriptions is self-evident. Most striking of all, however, is what these early inscriptions *do not* include: missing are assertions of tribal chauvinism, expressions of rival political claims, overt expressions of an Islamic confessional identity, and statements of theological import beyond the very general assertion of God's unity.⁸⁷ Moreover, there are no references to Muḥammad or to the *sunna* of the Prophet prior to 66 AH.⁸⁸ These concepts would, of course, become central to the Islamic community and its self-definition by the end of the first century AH at the latest,⁸⁹ but to judge from their earliest inscriptions, the Believers at first seem to have had little interest in leaving for posterity any reference to tribal ties, politics, confessionalism, or systematic theology, all of which apparently paled to insignificance in comparison with their need to prepare for the impending Judgment through proper piety and (as the inscriptions emphasize) by asking God's forgiveness. It was this that they wished to commemorate.

of an early document. By comparison, I would deem the literary report of an inscription of AH 29 in Cyprus (*RCĒA*, I, 5–6 no. 5) to be of dubious authenticity, because its date formula is inconsistent with that used in other first-century AH inscriptions (no other known early inscription says “year X of the *hijra*.”).

⁸⁷See also the bilingual (Greek and Arabic) receipts from Nessana in the Negev, mostly dating from AH 54–57 (one is from AH 70); only the opening phrase *bism allāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*, and the date, betray them as being by Believers. See Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, III, 175–97 (nos. 60–67).

⁸⁸Indeed, the private pious inscriptions mention Muḥammad only rarely, even during the second and into the third century AH—see the works cited above, 86 n. 81. Of the more than 400 inscriptions from the Negev edited by Nevo, Cohen, and Heftman, for example, most of which were probably written between AH 85/704 and AH 170/786, only eleven mention Muḥammad by name; in three of these he is identified as “prophet” (*nabī*), in two as “apostle” (*rasūl*), and in one as “bringer of good tidings” (*bashīr*). The first documentary mention of Muḥammad so far identified occurs on a coin from Bishāpūr issued in 66–67 AH by the governor ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Abd Allāh (Stuart D. Sears, personal communication; coin described in Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, 28 no. 11). Muḥammad's name only becomes common on coins following the coinage “reform” of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik in the 70s AH. The first epigraphic reference to Muḥammad known so far occurs on an Egyptian tombstone of AH 74: al-Hawary, “The Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known.”

⁸⁹The inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock (begun AH 72/692 CE) seem to be the earliest extant documents in which some of these notions appear in identifiable form. On the date, see Blair, “What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?”

The surviving documentary sources thus confirm the impression drawn from our analysis of the Qur'ān that the first Believers constituted a movement of militant personal piety, expressing itself in pious maxims⁹⁰ and in the Qur'ān itself as the essential guide (*al-hudā*) required by the community to attain salvation. Hence the popularity of the phrase, commonly employed in Arabic papyri of the first century AH as a closing salutation, "peace upon those who follow the guidance" (*al-salām 'alā man ittaba'a l-hudā*).⁹¹

We might note in passing here that some early non-Muslim sources seem to confirm this view of the early Believers as consumed with a concern for piety. The Nestorian monk Yōhannān bar Penkāyē, for example, who wrote in the late 680s, described the early *mhaggrāyē* (as Syriac authors call the Believers) as strictly dedicated to following the law, even stating that they sentenced to death anyone who publicly opposed Muḥammad's commandments (*nāmūsawh*).⁹²

LITERARY EVIDENCE

The largest body of evidence for the survival of the concern for piety in the century or so following Muḥammad, however, is provided not by contemporary documents, which are few in number, but by the *ḥadīth* literature—a vast collection of sayings attributed to Muḥammad or to his Companions.⁹³ We examined in the preceding chapter certain discrepancies between the Qur'ān text and the *ḥadīth* literature as a

⁹⁰These maxims were apparently circulated first by "holy men" of the early community of Believers, and in many cases were later "raised" to the status of Prophetic *ḥadīths*; see next section, on "Literary Evidence."

⁹¹E.g. Becker, *Papyri Schott-Reinhardt*, I, 58–61 (PSR Inv. Heid. Arab. 1–2, line 28) and 68–76 (PSR Inv. Heid. Arab. 3–7, lines 87–88). The phrase is Qur'ānic; although it occurs in the Qur'ān only once in this form, in Sūrat Tā Hā (20): 47, said by God to the children of Israel, the word *hudā*, "guidance," and other words from the same root are among the most frequently encountered in the Qur'ān.

⁹²Mingana, *Sources syriaques*, I, 146*–147*. See discussion in Donner, "From Muslims to Believers," near end.

⁹³For useful overviews of the various kinds of prose literature that developed in the century after Muḥammad's death, including the *ḥadīth* literature, see Juynboll, "On the Origins of Arabic Prose," and especially *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, I: *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*.

whole, discrepancies that helped us to conclude that the establishment of the canonical text of the Qur'ān must have antedated the collection of the *ḥadīth* literature.⁹⁴ Here we must note, however, that the *ḥadīth* literature resembles the Qur'ān markedly in one very important way: like the Qur'ān, its sayings place a strong emphasis on morality and piety. This similarity can hardly be accidental; rather, it most likely represents the survival into the later first and the second centuries AH, when many of the sayings in *ḥadīth* collections were first circulated and codified, of that overwhelming concern for morality and piety that marked the earliest community of Believers.

Even more than the Qur'ānic piety examined above,⁹⁵ the *ḥadīth* literature imbibed at the spring of Near Eastern traditions of piety from late antiquity, from which it derived not only much of its vocabulary, but much of its stock of attitudes and ideas as well; it is fair to assume that the pious content of the *ḥadīth* literature is descended, in good part, from "folk wisdom" of a pious variety that circulated widely in the Near East in the centuries before Muḥammad.⁹⁶ This is not to say that the *ḥadīth* literature lacks originality. Far from it; like the Qur'ān, it has its own particular emphases and points of special concern, shaped partly by the Qur'ān's own piety and sense of urgency, rooted in the perceived need to establish righteousness before the Hour came. Nevertheless, the early Believers were able to formulate many of their pious concerns by referring to a variety of terms and concepts that, as the heritage of late antique piety, were already familiar to them and to those around them, which probably explains the alacrity with which these concerns seem to have spread among the populations of the Near East.

As in the Qur'ān, we find in the *ḥadīth* literature both general exhortations to piety—what we have termed "paraenetic piety"—and sayings whose purpose is to establish more exactly how piety is (or is not)

⁹⁴This is not to say that all *ḥadīths* are later than the Qur'ān; some doubtless do go back to the Prophet, but as noted above in Chapter 1, the *ḥadīth* literature as a whole betrays later concerns.

⁹⁵See above, 70–75, for a discussion of the heritage of late antique piety in the Qur'ān.

⁹⁶Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 93, considered these sayings, parables, and bits of wisdom—which he terms an "ancient oriental form"—a way to preserve "the authority of the early Muslims."

to be defined—what we have termed “legalistic piety.”⁹⁷ But, the “legal” material in *ḥadīth* is generally more developed than that of the Qur’ān—that is, each individual account (*khābar*) is likely to focus more sharply on specific details of a particular practice than does the Qur’ān, whose “legalistic” verses often limit themselves to laying down broad guidelines of practice. This fits well with our assumption that the sayings in the *ḥadīth* literature represent a secondary stage in the development of piety within the community of Believers, one that took as its fundamental basis the insistent exhortations to “do good” and the general descriptions of ritual and communal duties that we find in the Qur’ān, and that built on that basis to provide the Believers with fuller and more explicit guidance.⁹⁸ The sayings in *ḥadīth* were thus the arena in which many moral issues were carefully defined: not only adultery, theft, prayer, ascetic practice, and other matters raised by the Qur’ān, but also—harking back to pre-Qur’ānic or extra-Qur’ānic morality—such things as *adab* or good manners: proper and improper salutations, ways of wearing the hair, table manners, the social virtues of various foods.⁹⁹

We also find in the *ḥadīth* reflections of the activist or militant piety that we observed in the Qur’ān, and that prevailed in the original community of Believers. The Prophet is reported to have said: “Whoever sees something reprehensible (*munkar*), let him change it with his hand; if he is not able, then with his tongue; if he is not able, then with his heart. That is the lower limit of Belief (*ad’af al-īmān*, lit. “the weakest of belief”).”¹⁰⁰ One of the earliest collections of traditions dealing

⁹⁷See above, 64–65. Cf. Speight, “Rhetorical Argumentation in the Hadith Literature of Islam.” (I thank Kathryn M. Kueny for this reference.) Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 177, offers one of the clearest statements of the relationship between these approaches to piety (approximating the distinction between “faith” and “works”).

⁹⁸The Qur’ān, for example, provides many exhortations to perform ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), but gives no clear description of how prayer is to be performed or even of how many prayers are required daily; it is the *ḥadīth* literature that spells out in detail just how and when ritual prayer is to be conducted.

⁹⁹For an idea of the range of topics covered in *ḥadīth*, it is sufficient to peruse the entries listed in Wensinck, *Handbook*. Some *ḥadīths* document the survival of pre-Islamic ascetic attitudes: e.g. Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, 146 no. 178, 149–50 no. 184—“break your fast on a scrap of bread and cold water.”

¹⁰⁰Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan*, VIII, 111–12 (*īmān*: *tafāḍul ahl al-īmān*).

with the subject of *jihād* includes a *ḥadīth* in which Islam's monasticism (*rahbānīya*) is said to be its *jihād fī sabīl Allāh*.¹⁰¹ *Jihād*, of course, is highly praised in the *ḥadīth* literature.¹⁰² The encouragement of an attitude of pitilessness toward the unbeliever that we noted above as one consequence of Qur'ānic discourse is also found in the early prose literature in the Islamic tradition, as for example in some of the accounts of the early Islamic conquests.¹⁰³

As Juynboll points out, early collections of *ḥadīth* were much less extensive than the later (third century AH) "canonical" collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, etc.,¹⁰⁴ and it seems likely that many of the sayings attributed to Muḥammad were originally sayings of early "holy men" (*fuqahā'*) from the first or early second centuries AH, sayings that were subsequently "raised" to the status of *ḥadīth* of some Companion of Muḥammad, or even of Muḥammad himself,¹⁰⁵ as the early Muslims came to view Muḥammad and his prophecy with increasing importance during and after the late first century AH. Indeed, some of the earliest extant collections of traditions, such as the *Muwatta'* of Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH), contain far more *ḥadīths* traced back to Companions of Muḥammad or to their successors than they do traditions traced to Muḥammad himself. Some early Islamic "saints" or holy men, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, related mainly pious exhortations; others, such as Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī, focused more on "legalistic" utterances defining the specifics of religious practice—that is, defining more sharply just what piety was.¹⁰⁶ It was the piety of these early holy men—and, conversely, the fact that their words and deeds conformed to standards

¹⁰¹Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, 37–38 nos. 15–16.

¹⁰²Cf. Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. "Warfare," for references by the hundred.

¹⁰³E.g. al-Balansī, *Kitāb al-ridda*, 103 (← Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī)—a dying enemy denied a drink after the battle of al-Yamāma.

¹⁰⁴Juynboll, "On the Origins of Arabic Prose," 168–69; *idem*, *Muslim Tradition*, esp. 23–30.

¹⁰⁵The fullest discussion of this phenomenon is Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, *infra*, esp. Chapter 1; e.g. 51–52 (on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī), 59–60 (on al-Sha'bī), 74–76.

¹⁰⁶This distinction between al-Ḥasan and Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī is made by Schacht, "Theology and Law in Islam," 8–9. On al-Ḥasan, see *El* 2, "Ḥasan al-Baṣrī" (H. Ritter); Schaeder, "Hasan al-Basri," Ritter, "Studien zur islamischen Frömmigkeit, I: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī." No secondary literature appears to exist on Ibrāhīm; on him see Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, I, 177–79 no. 325.

of piety that were held by many people and sometimes confirmed by the Qur'ān—that made their sayings memorable, not their identity as associates of Muḥammad.

The circulation and especially the writing down of these sayings, many of which later Islamic tradition came to consider *ḥadīths* of the Prophet Muḥammad, was not something that met with universal approval among the Believers despite the “saintliness” of those who trafficked in them. Early accounts relating the opposition of some *fuqahā'* to the writing down of *ḥadīth* do survive, regardless of the fact that the *ḥadīths* later became greatly revered by Muslims as a source of legal precedents and guidance. The accounts of opposition suggest that in the earliest period, the Qur'ān—“the Book” or “the Writing” (*al-kitāb*) par excellence—was originally seen by some Believers as the only true source of guidance (*hudā*), and that the act of writing down pious sayings and maxims was seen by them as a potential threat to the primacy of the Qur'ān's role.¹⁰⁷ “We used to write down nothing except the statement of faith¹⁰⁸ and the Qur'ān,” the Companion of Muḥammad and early transmitter Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693) is reported to have said, a comment clearly intended to call into question the writing of pious sayings of whatever kind.¹⁰⁹ An anecdote ascribed to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, another Companion, while defending the writing of *ḥadīths*, reveals some of the concerns of those who opposed writing *ḥadīth*:

¹⁰⁷The classic study on the subject is Goldziher, “Kämpfe um die Stellung des Hadīth im Islam;” more recently see also Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 19–21. This desire to preserve the revealed scripture's status as the unique source of religious guidance finds parallels in some other cultural traditions. In the Jewish community, the Pharisees' elaboration of an extensive “oral Torah” or interpretive tradition was viewed with alarm by the Sadducees for the same reason. See Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature*, 42. Compare also the struggle between Karaite “scripturalists” and the Rabbis, who championed, or at least recognized the validity of, Oral Law: on this see Hawting, “Two Citations of the Qur'ān in ‘Historical’ Sources for Early Islam;” *idem*, “The Significance of the Slogan *lā ḥukma illā li'illāh*.”

¹⁰⁸*al-tashahhud*, i.e. the statement, “There is no god but God.”

¹⁰⁹Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, III, 319 (no. 3648; *Ilm* 3). A statement attributed to 'Alī in which he opposes *ḥadīth* and favors Qur'ān is found in al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, III, 96–97.

I used to write down everything I heard from the Apostle of God, desiring to memorize it. Quraysh forbade me [to do so], saying: "Do you write everything [you hear], even though the Apostle of God is a mortal who speaks [at times] out of anger, or pleasure?" So I gave up writing [things]. Then I mentioned [that] to the Apostle of God, whereupon he motioned to his mouth with his finger and said: "Write, for by Him in Whose hands my soul is, nothing but Truth comes out of it."¹¹⁰

The anecdote shows that the opponents to the writing of *ḥadīth* were concerned that merely human, personal factors might be enshrined as a source of law, rather than the eternal and universal principles enshrined in the word of God.

This opposition did not win out. As the Believers came increasingly to emphasize the role and importance of Muḥammad as prophet, the fear that Muḥammad's example could be tainted by ordinary human failings gave way to an idealized image of him, akin to that of the Qur'ānic prophets. In the process, originally independent pious maxims were slowly converted into Prophetic *ḥadīths* by fitting them out with the necessary chain of authorities. *Ḥadīths* were written; the Qur'ān had to share with the pious wisdom of early sages among the Believers as a source of guidance. Henceforth, the community would look to both *kitāb* and *ḥikma*.

The Pious Tradition and History

We have seen above that the Qur'ān's overriding concern with piety is coupled with a decidedly ahistorical outlook. We have also seen that the other evidence for the temper of the early community of Believers—early inscriptions, and the oral wisdom literature that circulated in the early community of Believers, in its reincarnation as Prophetic *ḥadīth*—indicates a similar concern with piety. It is hardly surprising, then, that the historical outlook of the early community of Believers appears to have been very weak.

¹¹⁰Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, III, 318 (no. 3646; 'Ilm 3). 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr's reputation for being fond of *ḥadīth* is confirmed in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 36 bottom ('Ilm 40).

When reading about many of the “saints” of the later first century AH (admittedly, in accounts found in sources dating to a century or more after their lives), one cannot fail to notice how the numerous accounts about them, and sayings by them, focus on the moral (or sometimes the ritual) aspects of piety.¹¹¹ This is true not only of people who are remembered primarily as pious preachers, such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Maymūn ibn Mihrān, but also of figures like ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz—who, because he was a member of the ruling Umayyad family and served for a time as caliph, one might expect to be rather fully documented. When we peruse these accounts, however, we are seldom, if ever, treated to a plausible glimpse of the holy man’s personality or its development over time; rarely if ever do we sense a glimmer of human feeling other than abject humility and fear before God, or righteous rage against the sinner. Likewise, we are denied much sense of the person’s history, even in its externals. Anecdotes from their lives are recounted, to be sure, but they have meaning only when anchored in a moral context (as in Qur’ānic narratives about the prophets), and one has the feeling that the episodes float about without firm historical mooring; it is almost impossible to determine, for example, whether one such episode took place before or after another in the same saint’s life (if, indeed, we wish to assume that the episodes actually happened at all, and are not merely literary motifs). Especially in this fact, we see the degree to which the moral, ahistorical vision of the world that is found in the Qur’ān has been retained in these later writings. The saints’ lives are overwhelmingly moralizing and didactic, examples of how the man of God behaved in a given moral situation—just as the earlier prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān are portrayed as examples to be followed. In neither case, however, can their representation be called, properly speaking, historical.¹¹²

The accounts about the early Muslim saint Khālīd ibn Ma’dān (d. between 103 and 108 AH), collected in the *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’* of Abū

¹¹¹One of the most convenient collections of accounts about and sayings by these early “holy men” can be found in Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī’s *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*.

¹¹²An interesting parallel may exist in the Byzantine tradition, where a contrast between historiography and hagiography has been drawn by Patlagean, “Ancienne hagiographie byzantine et histoire sociale.”

Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 430/1038), illustrate the ahistorical quality of the pious literature.¹¹³ A few of the accounts, since they relate to his death, can be fixed within the chronology of his life, but most of the sayings by or about him are chronologically indeterminate; their purpose is to provide pious maxims—timeless moral guidance—not specific historical information. Among the pearls of wisdom Khālīd is reported to have uttered are the following: “If the gate of blessing (*bāb al-khayr*) opens for one of you, hurry to enter it, for you do not know when it may close again.” “The servant (*‘abd*, i.e. servant of God, Believer) should give thanks by saying ‘Praise be to God,’ even if he is in bed with a beautiful girl.” “Abraham, when eating a bunch of grapes, used to mention the name of God with each individual grape.” “I read in some book: ‘Make yourself go hungry, and rebuke [your soul]... and perhaps you will see God.’” In this regard, apparently, Khālīd followed his own advice, for he is reported to have died fasting. It is said that he did ten thousand rosaries per day, and that when he had died and was put on the bier for washing, his fingers were moving as if doing a rosary.¹¹⁴ It is also said that he never lay down on his bed without mentioning his longing for the Apostle of God and his Companions of the Muḥājirūn and Anṣār. From the information available, it is difficult to say anything about the course of Khālīd ibn Ma’dān’s life; we can reach an evaluation of his moral character, but even this is presented as static and unchanging, so that any sense of the historical development of his particular personality is lacking.

We can conclude, then, that historical narration—the conscious effort to explain a specific human situation by relating how it resulted from a sequence of earlier events—was not particularly important to the early community of Believers, either in Muḥammad’s time or for at least a generation thereafter. Their overwhelming concern for piety had simply obliterated any sense of history as having significance.

¹¹³Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, V, 210–21.

¹¹⁴The text (Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’*, V, 210) uses the word *tasbīḥ*, which usually means simply “to praise God” (by saying *subḥān Allāh*, “May God be exalted!”), so we might wish to construe the passage as saying we should praise God ten thousand times daily. But the word *masbaḥa* means rosary, and the reference to moving fingers suggests that along with the offering of praise, prayer beads were being fingered.

When, then, did a concern with historical narration begin to take root among the Believers? To answer this, we must consider the various forms of legitimation that were used by the Believers and early Muslims. For, as we shall see, it was only when the Believers began to face internal and external challenges to their legitimacy that historical narration became indispensable to them.

CHAPTER 3

STYLES OF LEGITIMATION IN THE EARLY COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

Piety as a Form of Legitimation

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, Islam began as a movement of militant piety, a movement that stressed the moral duties of the individuals who made up the community of Believers. Piety was a pattern of behavior that expressed the Believer's dedication to God, and ensured the individual's eventual salvation after death (or so, at least, the pious hoped). But, it was also more than that, for in the early community of Believers piety became a crucial determinant of one's standing in the community in this world, no less than one's standing in the next. The only distinction among people that the first community of Believers explicitly acknowledged was the moral (religious) one, which equated piety with goodness and impiety with evil. It was natural, therefore, that when there arose within the community of Believers political and social tensions and disputes over leadership—as was sure to happen—the Believers first resorted to considerations of piety to resolve those issues. Other distinctions commonly used in human societies to settle disputes and establish an individual's status—tribal or family affiliation, historical associations, or claims based on property, class, ethnicity, etc.—do not appear as part of the original Islamic scheme of things. They do not figure in the Qur'ān or in the "Constitution of Medina," nor do they surface significantly in extant early inscriptions.

Legitimation among the earliest Believers, in short, meant legitimation through piety (*taqwā* = mindfulness of God and the Last Day).

Even after the passage of several generations, the Believers' focus on piety is still readily palpable in surviving sources; the aura of religious authority emitted by such early "holy men" as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) or Maymūn ibn Mihrān (d. 117/735–36) or Khālīd ibn Ma'dān al-Kalā'ī (d. between 103 and 108 AH) was rooted solely in their reputation for piety, as understood in their day. Like most other early Islamic "holy men," they were of humble origin—often descendants of captives of war—and could not claim the slightest degree of relationship to the Prophet, or precedence of conversion, or membership in a prominent tribe or an elite social class. Their status within the community was established solely by their piety—which may have included their perceived knowledge of the Qur'ān and their success in living in accordance with its precepts, and in accordance with less well-articulated, but widely understood and accepted, norms of pious behavior. Indeed, it may have been this very feature of the early community of Believers that made it possible for new members to join it so quickly,¹ since the moral or ethical code was open to all and social or historical distinctions in claims to religious identity and even to status within the religious community were completely lacking. As a result, the lowly *mawālī*—non-Arab clients of Arab tribesmen, often captives or the children of captives—rapidly became a numerous element in the community of Believers.² In short, religious authority among the earliest Believers originally consisted in being "holier than thou," and nothing more; and this orientation to piety, though soon joined by other factors, survived

¹I intentionally set aside here the terminology of "conversion to Islam." The notion of "conversion" assumes, of course, that the community one is joining has a clear confessional identity distinct from the confessions from which the convert originated; but, it seems to me that the original community of Believers may not have been characterized by such confessional distinctness. Rather, the Believers may have adopted a distinct confessional identity as Muslims only in the second half of the first century AH. On this, see Donner, "From Believers to Muslims."

²I do not wish to suggest here that all *mawālī* embraced Islam because they were drawn to it by religious conviction. Although in some cases—just how many we will never know—this doubtless happened, we should not minimize the importance of purely pragmatic factors—such as economic or social advantages, or the fact that the conquering Believers took many slaves, the offspring of whom grew up as Muslims.

as a means of legitimation in the community of Believers through much of the first century AH and into the second.

In our discussion of piety in the previous chapter, we noted that it might display one of two emphases.³ One variety—which we called the paraenetic—concentrates on exhorting the hearer to do good or to be pious, rather than on defining exactly what is or is not pious behavior. The assumption underlying such paraenetic expressions is that what constitutes good or bad behavior is generally known; and since it is known, a person's failure to be pious is essentially a failure of the will—a conscious decision not to follow existing moral imperatives. Consequently, paraenetic piety takes the form of statements of "moral support" and exhortations to do that which one knows to be right, as a way of strengthening the resolve of wavering souls faced with temptation. About paraenetic piety little more needs to be said here, as it did not contribute meaningfully to the definition of political and religious legitimation in the Islamic community, since all parties and groups used it.⁴

At the other end of the spectrum of piety is what we have called legal piety—expressions that concentrate on offering a precise definition of what in fact constitutes piety. The assumption in this case is that even people who earnestly wish to be pious may fail because of their ignorance of just what constitutes piety—that is, they may sin by accident, or oversight, or against their will. For this reason, the precise articulation of the proper way to act in a given situation is seen as necessary to ensure that people will not sin unknowingly. In what follows we shall take a closer look at trends in legal piety in the community of Believers, because it was mainly this expression of piety that was used to articulate arguments relating to the question of legitimacy.⁵

Early Islamic piety, as embodied in the pious maxims of the *ḥadīth* literature, came to stress the importance of intention (*nīya*),⁶ but de-

³See above, 64–65, 90–91.

⁴On this see Athamina, "Al-Qaṣaṣ."

⁵The way in which piety became a battleground for contending groups in early Islamic times is discussed in Athamina, "The 'Ulamā' in the Opposition;" also *idem*, "Al-Qaṣaṣ."

⁶The term *nīya* does not occur in the Qur'ān, but the whole paraenetic thrust of the Qur'ān's injunctions implies that the individual's intentions are of ultimate

veloped much more fully than did the Qur'ān the precise description of what constituted piety. The notion that became generally enshrined in Islamic law was certainly that the legal validity of an act depends on one's intention in doing it,⁷ but Muslim jurists seem to have expended most of their energy on providing precise definitions of what was, in fact, the law in a given case, and any reading of Islamic law (or of the *ḥadīths* on which it is largely based) leaves one with the strong impression that many acts (e.g. prayer) can be invalidated by merely accidental lapses or irregularities of procedure, even though one's intentions may have been sincere. As we noted in the preceding chapter, the need to clarify general injunctions encountered in the Qur'ān or in moral maxims, or even to clarify quite specific dictates, led to a proliferation of accounts offering more precise definitions.⁸

The proliferation and collection of these accounts, and the debates over them, was part of the process by which Muslims decided what was acceptable "Islamic" behavior and what was beyond the pale, and was related directly to debates over the legitimacy of various claimants for leadership within the community.⁹ In effect, piety was considered to be external evidence of the claimants' inner moral qualities as Believers; and one finds, from an early date in the history of the community, accounts in which the claims of various figures to religious or political authority are evaluated in terms of piety. The story of the pious Companion Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī and his complaints against 'Uthmān's governor in Syria, Mu'āwīya, over the latter's arrogation of tribute that, in Abū Dharr's opinion, should have been distributed among the Muslims at large¹⁰ may be early or may be an interpolation of late Umayyad date designed to undermine Umayyad rule, but

importance. In this respect Islamic law resembles Jewish law, for in texts like the Mishnah and Talmud, intentionality is often the focus of legal discussion. (I thank Kathryn Kueny for this observation.)

⁷E.g. the opening *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*: "I heard the Apostle of God (ṣ) say: 'Works are only [to be assessed] according to the[ir] intentions. A person shall get credit only for what he intends. . . .' (*innamā li-kulli imra'in mā nawā. . .*)."

⁸See above, 91 n. 98. Maxims arising as fuller explanations of Qur'ānic passages formed one component of the genre of Qur'ān commentaries.

⁹This debate also gradually gave rise to a corpus of specific laws or regulations—the *sharī'a*.

¹⁰Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2858–60.

it echoes a dismayed concern over the proliferation of wealth (particularly among the ruling class) expressed in numerous *ḥadīths* and other sayings of apparently early date.¹¹ Of the hundreds of accounts about the mutiny against 'Uthmān during the First Civil War, it is safe to say that the majority have as their main purpose portraying either 'Uthmān or the mutineers against him as motivated by cupidity, lust for power, favoritism for his (impious) kinsmen, and other moral failings. Accusations of impiety directed against the later Umayyads by their critics, or vice-versa, are also common.¹² Such accounts reveal the staying power of pious legitimation in Islamic political and historical discourse.¹³

The most uncompromising in their observance of this demand for piety during the first century AH were, perhaps, those who came to be called Khawārij or Khārījīs.¹⁴ The reputation of the Khawārij for strict piety is well known; many were renowned for their pale complexions, the result of long fasting and vigils, and for the calluses that formed on their foreheads from frequent prostrations in prayer.¹⁵ The tendency to view the Khawārij as a "sect" and to emphasize doctrinal issues that eventually led them to be considered "unorthodox" has sometimes obscured the fact that their motivation—which was to establish communities of truly pure Believers—appears to be an exact continuation of the original mission of Muḥammad.¹⁶ The early Khārījī "commu-

¹¹On the proliferation of wealth, see 'Umar ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, 1022–24.

¹²See, for example, one which implies indiscriminate criticism of *any* Umayyad: "...I heard the Apostle of God say: 'Verily, one of the tyrants of the Umayyad family will ascend this pulpit of mine'" (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, II, 385 bottom).

¹³The survival of pious legitimation in Islamic historical discourse is treated more fully below in the context of "hybridization," 212–14.

¹⁴See *EI* 2, "Khāridjites," (L. Veccia Vaglieri); *EI* 2, "Istī'raḍ" (C. Pellat); Watt, "Khārījite Thought in the Umayyad Period;" Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien*, 3–55.

¹⁵Some telling early references to Khārījī piety are related in Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, 467, 470–72.

¹⁶The most pungent statement of this often-overlooked possibility is Wellhausen's: "The Khawārij are a true product of Islam, not a weed secretly sown by the Jew Ibn Saba" (*Oppositionsparteien*, 12). See also Décobert, *Le mendiant et le combattant*, 107–108. A tendency to overemphasize the doctrinal and sectarian na-

nities of saints”¹⁷ held the feet of all Believers to the fire of absolute obedience to God’s word with a zeal and intolerance that struck fear into the hearts of many Believers. Their unyielding self-righteousness, however, caused most Khārijite groups to fragment rapidly, because no leaders, not even their own, could live up to such high ideals of piety. As an early Khārijī poet is reported to have said, referring to his battles against those he deemed evil:

I strike among the enemy to take vengeance
So that the state of the evil ones¹⁸ may vanish
And the virtuous¹⁹ may again have their due.²⁰

Piety was not long to remain unchallenged as the unique road to legitimate status in the community of Believers, however. It was soon—indeed, almost immediately—joined by other considerations, introduced by various parties in an effort to establish the legitimacy of their claims to leadership within the community, or out of a desire to challenge the claim of others. Some of these other styles of legitimation (such as the genealogical) were actually very old, the continuation of traditions of legitimation long current in the pre-Islamic Near East; others represented approaches developed specifically within the community of Believers to deal with the question of the community’s leadership. In all instances, they show the impact of the concept of moral legitimation (piety) on them; and in some cases, they in turn affected the development of the concept of moral legitimation.

ture of early Khārijism is particularly noticeable in Veccia Vaglieri’s article. Even though she notes the Khārijīs’ “puritanism” and admits that Khārijism was a “popular movement in its origins,” Khārijism still comes across in her treatment primarily as an aberrant theological movement. This tendency in Western scholarship is doubtless the result of the (almost inevitable) reliance on Muslim here-siographical works, which naturally stressed the doctrinal aspects of the Khārijī movement.

¹⁷The phrase is that of Watt, “Khārijite Thought in the Umayyad Period,” 221.

¹⁸*dawlat al-ashrār*.

¹⁹*al-akhyār*.

²⁰*Rajaz* of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī; see ‘Abbās, ed., *Shi‘r al-khawārij*, 31–32.

Genealogical Legitimation²¹

In most societies, ties of kinship (real or assumed) have formed one of the basic determinants of an individual's social standing; in many cases, being of the "right" family or ethnic group has counted for more than anything else in evaluating one's claim to privilege. We may call this procedure GENEALOGICAL LEGITIMATION; it rests on the assumption that the mere fact of membership in a particular kinship or ethnic group accords legitimate claim to special status.

The concept of ethnic or genealogical legitimation already had a long history in the Near East by the time Islam appeared. In Sasanian Iran, for example, the claim to be a member of the pure Aryan race had been employed in rulers' inscriptions, and presumably helped bolster the ruling dynasty's claim against that of upstarts of "ignoble" lineage.²² In pre-Islamic Arabia, family and tribal²³ identities were especially important in assessing an individual's social status and political position. Arabian tribal groups expressed the unity of the tribe as mutual descent from a common (sometimes eponymous) ancestor, even in cases where this was certainly only a convenient fiction. Tribesmen evaluated the relative status of individuals largely according to which tribe, and to which lineage within the tribe, they belonged. Some people were seen as being of "noble stock," others of base descent; and, although the performance of noteworthy deeds of valor, generosity, or other criteria for leadership could raise one's "stock" in the estimation of others (just as failure to do so could lower it), it could usually do so only within certain limits.²⁴ Noble deeds might help members of a tribe decide which person among several claimants from rival lineages to choose as their leader, for example, enabling them to choose a candi-

²¹Cf. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 38–39; Noth/Conrad, 37–38; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 49–61. An excellent overview of the general problems of form, function, and historicity relating to genealogies is found in Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World*, 11–55.

²²See for example the Naqsh-i Rostam inscription of Shapur I, with its references to the Iranians as "the race of the gods:" Sprengling, *Third Century Iran*, 14–20.

²³On the problems inherent in this term, and for a fuller explanation of the tribal "pecking order" described in this paragraph, see Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 20–49.

²⁴On how severe these constraints could be, see Obermann, "Early Islam," 262, describing the complaint of the poet 'Urwa ibn al-Ward.

date from a lineage of lesser prominence; but noble deeds by a member of one of the lowest-class “pariah” tribes, although they could perhaps win him recognition as the leader of his tribe, would not enable him to be considered for leadership of a larger coalition including tribes of significantly higher status.²⁵ Given the fact that in pre-Islamic (and later) Arabia the social support of an individual’s tribe was his primary guarantor of personal safety, it is natural that it should have been one of the most important determinants of personal identity. Pronounced tribal chauvinism was characteristic of this society and its culture.

The Qur’ān, of course, explicitly rejects such claims based on blood descent, and thus attempts to make a sharp break with pre-Islamic Arabian practice. In stirring passages it makes clear that the old ties of blood—even to people as close as members of one’s immediate family, the most sacred of ties in pre-Islamic Arabian society—were now to be superseded by the new bonds of faith among Believers:

1. You will not find a people (*qawm*) who Believe in God and the Last Day being friendly with those who combat God and His Apostle, even though they be their own parents or children or brethren or tribe (*‘ashīra*)...²⁶
2. O you who Believe! Do not take your parents and brethren as friends if they prefer disbelief (*kufr*) to Belief (*īmān*). Whosoever of you draws close to them, these are the oppressors. Say: If your parents and children and brethren and spouses and tribe (*‘ashīra*) and your wealth (*amwāl*) that you earned and the trade whose sluggishness you fear are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and striving (*jihād*) in His way, then wait until God brings His Decision (*amr*). For God does not guide sinful peoples (*al-qawm al-fāsiqūn*).²⁷

²⁵In any case, one gains the impression that “noble deeds” were more expected from men of “noble” tribes, and hence that any noteworthy deed performed by someone of high status was seen as an automatic confirmation of his high status, whereas someone of lower status had to work harder to secure the same degree of recognition.

²⁶Sūrat al-Mujādila (58): 22.

²⁷Sūrat al-Barā’a (9): 23–24.

From the Qur'ānic point of view, then, there could be no question of kinship having any bearing on claims to community membership or leadership. All that really mattered in determining a person's standing, in the Qur'ān's view, was his Belief and pious action. Its rejection of genealogical legitimation was thus complete and virtually absolute.²⁸

The old Arabian concern for kinship ties did not die out, however. Rather, it survived in the community of Believers with great vigor into later, post-Qur'ānic times, and eventually gave rise to a full-fledged science of genealogy.²⁹ Reverence for kinship ties was simply too deeply rooted in the routine workings of Near Eastern (particularly Arabian) society to be plucked out at will, so that, Qur'ānic rejection notwithstanding, kinship ties were called on by some early Believers to legitimize their claims to status and authority in the community.³⁰

Many accounts provide evidence of the survival of kinship and tribal identities and tribal chauvinisms well into the early Islamic period. Tribal chauvinism continued to thrive because tribal rivalries still played an important role among Arabian Muslims after the rise of Islam, not only in Arabia itself, but also in the conquered territories. The tribesmen in the garrison towns or in the countryside in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt (whether they were newcomers to these regions, or had long lived there, as was the case with some Syrian tribes) found themselves in competition with one another for land, booty, military commands, and government patronage. Rivalry was especially intense between tribal groups that had become established in an area at an early date—before Islam, or with the first wave of conquests—and those that had arrived more recently. Events such as the famous battle of Marj Rāhiṭ (64/684), which (further) inflamed relations between the tribes of Kalb and Qays

²⁸Noth, "Früher Islam," 25–26, observes that Muḥammad's preaching did not praise his own tribe, Quraysh, even though this was, in traditional tribal terms, what a leader should do.

²⁹A good overview of the early development of the science of genealogy in the Islamic tradition is found in Caskel, *Ġamharat an-Nasab*, I, 19–47. See also Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, I, 177–216 (= *Muslim Studies*, I, 164–198 on genealogy: chapter on "The Shu'ūbiyya and its Manifestation in Scholarship").

³⁰Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, I, 101–46 (= *Muslim Studies*, I, 98–136) discusses the clash between the Qur'ān egalitarian conception of society and the "ever increasing arrogance and racial presumption of the Arabs" (*Muslim Studies*, 98).

in Syria and led to decades of feuding between them and their allies, are only the highlights in a continuous saga of intertribal friction. This friction generated many accounts (and much poetry) that displays a marked tribal chauvinism.

For example, we find accounts in which particular tribes are said to have been associated with various Qur'ānic prophets—a suggestion that, of course, increased the stature of the tribes in question and enhanced their claim, perhaps, to hold political and/or religious leadership. The Judhām tribe, we are told, were in-laws (*aṣḥār*) of Moses and the people of Shu'ayb; likewise, both Nakha' and Thaḳīf claimed to be descendants of Abraham.³¹ In a slightly different vein, but with similar intent, is the claim that Madhḥij would be the greatest tribe in paradise,³² or purely chauvinistic claims put in the mouth of the Prophet, such as the *ḥadīth* in which he says: "How good a tribe is Azd, beautiful-mouthed, pure-hearted,"³³ or in which he predicts a victory by the tribe of Dhuhl over the Persians, with God's help, and noting the pre-Islamic battle of Dhū Qār as a precursor.³⁴ Another account has the Prophet flaunt the virtues of his own clan, Banū Hāshim: "The Banū Hāshim surpass [other] people in six qualities: they are the most knowledgeable, bravest, most generous, most forbearing (*aḥlam*), most magnanimous (*aṣḥaḥ*), and most beloved to their womenfolk."³⁵ It is hardly surprising that compilations devoted to the genealogy of various tribal groups appeared, beginning in the first half of the second century AH, if not before.³⁶

³¹'Abd Allāh ibn Wahb, *Le Djāmi' d'Ibn Wahb*, 1 (of papyrus), lines 4 and 16–18 respectively.

³²*Ibid.*, 1:1.

³³*Ibid.*, 5:19–20.

³⁴Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, 829 (no. 1511).

³⁵'Umar ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, 638–39. A collection of such *faḍā'il* ("virtues") accounts for Hāshim, Quraysh, and other tribes is found at 638–51 in this text.

³⁶Al-Dūrī, "Kutub al-ansāb wa-ta'rikh al-jazīra." Sezgin, citing al-Jāhiz, claims that books of tribal genealogy were already composed before the rise of Islam (*GAS*, I, 245), and lists by title early compilations on *nasab Rabī'a*, *nasab Himyar*, *nasab wuld 'Adnān*, *nasab Quraysh*, *nasab banī Dabba*, etc. (*GAS*, I, 248–49)—some, according to Sezgin, appearing as early as AH 60. Obermann, however, takes the opposite view: "Since prior to the rise of Islam the art of writing was virtually

But the peculiar historical circumstances of the early Islamic community led it to develop the old concern for kinship and tribal identity in much more elaborate forms than had existed before the rise of Islam. The main results of this process were a) the doctrine that the caliph must be drawn from the tribe of Quraysh, and b) the construction of comprehensive genealogical systems embracing complete tribes, and eventually all Arabs.³⁷ Each of these was the product of particular historical forces.

The doctrine that the caliph had to be a member of the tribe of Quraysh seems to have evolved slowly. Numerous accounts reveal that among the early Believers various groups other than the Quraysh claimed, for themselves or others, the right to be caliphs. For example, a *ḥadīth* circulating in Ḥimyarite circles in the second/eighth century (if not earlier), presents the Prophet as saying: "This matter (scil. political leadership) was among Ḥimyar, then God took it away from them and placed it among Quraysh. But it will return to them."³⁸ The Khārijīs, true guardians of the original Believers' emphasis on piety, rejected altogether claims to religious and political leadership of the community based on genealogy; at the other extreme, the Shī'a claimed that the

unknown in North Arabia... and since the pagan Arabs had developed no systematic treatment of their genealogical traditions, it was only some time after the rise of Islam that complete genealogical tables were first compiled and committed to writing... ("Early Islam," 252). For an overview of the development of the Arab genealogies, see *EI* ², "Nasab" (F. Rosenthal), and Caskel, *Ġamharat an-nasab*, I, 23-47.

³⁷We use the term "Arab" here much in the modern nationalist sense of one whose native tongue or native culture is Arabic, which was also probably the guiding (albeit implicit?) principle that determined who figured in the early genealogies. It is not entirely clear, however, exactly what criteria, beyond linguistic heritage, may have figured in deciding who was, or was not, an "Arab." That is, it is not clear whether, strictly speaking, someone was included in the genealogies because he was considered an Arab, or whether one was considered an Arab because he was included in the genealogies. Crucial test cases might be sought by examining the genealogies' treatment of "Arabs" settled in regions beyond Arabia and to some extent acculturated to those regions—Aramaized settlers from Arabia in Iraq or Syria, for example, or Arabian tribesmen settled in Khurāsān, or even the (distant) Quraysh of Baghdad.

³⁸Cited from Nu'aym ibn Ḥammad's *Kitāb al-ḥitan* in Madelung, "Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad Age," 151-52.

caliphate should be in the hands not of the Quraysh at large, but only in the line of the Prophet's cousin, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib. But by the middle of the second century AH, a majority in the Muslim community seems to have come to accept the idea that the caliphate belonged within the tribe of Quraysh, without explicitly favoring a particular lineage within the tribe.³⁹

The construction of comprehensive Arab genealogies seems to have been the product of another set of forces entirely: the tension in the early Islamic empire between the dominant "Arabs," however they were defined, and the subject peoples of other ethnic-linguistic groups. Subject peoples, especially those from highly cultured backgrounds, could and did challenge the legitimacy of rule by the "rude" Arabian conquerors, whom they saw as lacking in the refined cultural values they took for granted.⁴⁰ Eventually, this resentment emerged in literary form during the second century AH as the Shu'ūbiya movement. The development of the Arab genealogical literature was, in a sense, a counterpart or response to this. Arabians were able to respond that their rule was legitimate because, as the people to whom the Prophet had been sent and in whose language the Qur'ān had been revealed, they were the rightful heirs of the Prophet, whose mission was, after all, universal. They could argue that the prophets who had been sent to these peoples beforehand had been superseded by Muḥammad, who had renewed their message in more accurate form. From their point of view, therefore, it was entirely just that they should rule others; it was simply a further evidence of God's divine favor.⁴¹ As Aḥmad ibn

³⁹Note the interesting account in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, XII, 515, lower half, in which 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ is reported to have explained to the ruler of Alexandria ('azīm min 'uzamā'ihim) how God had raised the Prophet's early followers to sovereignty over other Arabs—evidently an historicization of the Quraysh claim.

⁴⁰Sometimes groups with little literate background also advanced claims: e.g. Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī, *Kitāb Ibn Sallām*, 145–46, where the Prophet praises the Berbers.

⁴¹For example, see al-Tabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 2195 (in the struggle of Arabs vs. Persians, God now backs the Arabs); or *ibid.*, I, 2095 (Arabs associated with Islam, Rome associated with *shirk*); *ibid.*, I, 2239–44 ("We Arabs were the most miserable of people, eating snakes, etc.; then God sent us His Prophet to guide us...").

Ḥanbal put it: "To love the Arabs is belief (*īmān*), and to hate the Arabs is hypocrisy (*nifāq*)."⁴²

This claim was only plausible, however, if all "Arabs" could be shown to be descendants of a common ancestor, like the children of Israel, and so forming a common people, for whom Muḥammad had been selected as apostle and prophet. Out of this need arose the vast genealogical works, whose ultimate purpose was thus to establish the legitimacy of the ruling elite and of its "Arab" allies to rule. The paucity of references in *ḥadīth* to Arabs—as opposed to references to specific tribes, which are more numerous—suggests that this motivation crystallized only in the late second century AH or later.⁴³

Genealogical legitimation also elicited opposition from some quarters, of course, particularly from those who clung most tenaciously to the original notion that piety should be the sole, or main, measure of a person's standing in the community. Such attitudes were eventually put into the mouth of the Prophet,⁴⁴ who is reported to have condemned the knowledge of genealogies as useless,⁴⁵ and to have condemned the construction of false genealogies: "God will bar from heaven anyone who knowingly claims descent from (*idda'ā ilā*) someone other than his own father."⁴⁶ The Khārijīs, for their part, true to the principle of pious legitimation, argued that the Quraysh had no monopoly of the caliphate at all, and that the most pious Muslim in the community should be caliph, regardless of his tribal origins, "even if he were an Abyssinian slave,"⁴⁷ that is, of the social group that was, by traditional Arabian criteria, considered to be of the lowest standing.

The Khārijīs were fighting a losing battle, however, and it was only among them that genealogical legitimation failed to take firm root. Among most Believers, genealogy became—or remained—an important

⁴² Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb al-sunna*, 38.

⁴³ See Wensinck, *Handbook*, s.v. "Tribes;" *idem*, *Concordance*, s.v. "'arab," for *ḥadīth* references.

⁴⁴ If, indeed, he did not subscribe to them himself—although the extant formulation of this idea in *ḥadīths* may well be later.

⁴⁵ Abd Allāh ibn Wahb, *Le Djāmi' d'Ibn Wahb*, 4:4–6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:6–7; also 2:10–13, 4:6–7.

⁴⁷ See above, 42 n. 23, for references. For a recent study of this tradition, see Crone, "'Even an Ethiopian Slave.'"

basis for claims to political and religious legitimacy. By the second century AH the doctrine that the caliphate should be limited to Quraysh had become generally recognized among the emerging "Sunnī"/Murji'ī mainstream of the Muslim community, and among the Sh'ra the doctrine that the caliphate should be limited to the close relatives of Muḥammad—particularly, the descendants of 'Alī—seems to have become established at about the same time.

Theocratic Legitimation (Appeal to Divine Will)

Another form of argument for legitimacy that emerged in the first Islamic century can be called THEOCRATIC LEGITIMATION—that is, the assertion that one occupies a superior position because God wants it that way. Rooted in the Qur'ān's frequent expressions of God's omnipotence, it enabled those in power to justify their position regardless of their shortcomings in terms of piety, genealogy, etc. The Umayyad caliphs' designation of themselves as "God's deputy" (*khalīfat Allāh*), for which numismatic and literary attestation exists, seems to be an early expression of this concept.⁴⁸ By late Umayyad times, the Umayyads' spokesmen had elaborated a complex set of arguments to bolster their legitimacy. These included the assertion that the Umayyads had inherited, by God's choice, the duty of enforcing Muḥammad's law after the Prophet's death, so that obedience to the Umayyad caliphs was an absolute religious duty of all Muslims.⁴⁹

The argument that one rules by God's will is obviously one that can only be used by those who actually hold power or authority, not by those who wish to challenge the establishment, a one-way quality that made it especially dear to the Umayyads. The opposition can only combat it by disputing the premise on which it is based—that God, being omnipotent, has also foreordained all events and actions, even, for example, a person's sins. For this reason, we find that by the

⁴⁸The earliest documentary attestation is on a coin of 'Abd al-Malik; see Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 4–23, for the evidence and discussion. They show that literary sources apply the phrase *khalīfat Allāh* to the caliphs 'Uthmān, Mu'āwiya, and other early Umayyads, although no documentary attestation of such an early use of the phrase is extant.

⁴⁹On this, see the analysis of the letters of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yahyā in al-Qāḍī, "The Religious Foundation of Late Umayyad Ideology and Practice."

late Umayyad period (late first and early second century AH) the claim to theocratic legitimation had merged into part of a more extensive theological dispute over free will and predestination.⁵⁰

Historicizing Legitimation: General Considerations

In addition to the styles of legitimation already discussed (pietistic, genealogical, and theocratic), Believers developed another variety—HISTORICIZING LEGITIMATION, or legitimation by means of narratives about the past—that eventually became of paramount importance in the Islamic tradition. Before describing it, however, we need to consider briefly some general issues raised by the existence of this form of legitimation.

It is not immediately obvious *why* reference to the past has legitimizing power.⁵¹ What is it that spurs some cultures to develop an interest in history? What is it about the past that makes humans so susceptible to it? The answer may lie in the human yearning for a way to vanquish death. The inexorable reality and inescapable finality of death threatens us with the sickening apprehension that we, and everything we do, are ultimately meaningless. To dispel this doubt, we must ensure that something is remembered *in the future*; for we know that what is forgotten has no significance—or, perhaps we should say, what is deemed of no significance is inevitably forgotten.⁵² Ironically, it is this need to ensure that things are remembered in the future that

⁵⁰ An extensive literature exists on the *qadariya* or free-will debate, including its political implications. For an orientation, see *EI* ², “*Qadariyya*” (J. van Ess). The classic early treatise is al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s *Risāla fī l-qadar*, studied and edited in Ritter, “Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit,” 1–83 (text edition at 67–83). For fuller information, see van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, II, 46–121 (al-Baṣra), 643–55 (Mecca), 668–77 (Medina), 706–708 (Yemen).

⁵¹ There is a voluminous literature on historiography, theory of history, and philosophy of history, of which I have perused only a small portion. However, most of the works I have reviewed are interested mainly in questions of epistemology, history’s presumed (or contested) “truth-value,” and different kinds of historical proof; few take up what seems to me to be the logically prior question of why humans feel a need to know the “truth” about the past in the first place. One author who touches on it is Shils, *Tradition*, esp. Chapter 1, “In the Grip of the Past,” 34–62.

⁵² This is different from saying that something forgotten has no impact. It is obvious that many events or factors may have a profound, if unrecognized, impact on later times; but, until that impact and the factors that caused it are discov-

spurs people to create history.⁵³ For events or situations can only be given significance by situating them within a context that stretches back into the past, to an *arché* or putative beginning.⁵⁴ The intervening development that is seen as stretching from the *arché* to the event or situation at issue we can, loosely, call a *tradition*,⁵⁵ and it is the existence of a tradition that gives the event or issue its significance in the present—when the history is being written. By placing an event or situation in the context of a tradition—an interpretive scheme—one asserts that the event or situation is worthy of being remembered in the future. For an act performed, or an event that occurs, outside of an historical (interpretive) tradition has no reason to be remembered in the future; it is meaningless. A corollary of this is, of course, that traditions are always fundamentally retrospective. That is, a given moment or event is never identified at the time as the *arché* of a tradition; rather, a crystallizing tradition reaches back into the past and identifies some moment in the past as its *arché*. That moment only gains historical significance later, in the context of the newly forming tradition; and, as the character and values of the tradition slowly evolve with the passage of time, the character and meaning of the *arché* is correspondingly reevaluated. In the case of the Islamic tradition, as we shall see in the next section, this crystallization and identification

ered, those factors will not, in the minds of people of later times, be significant (meaningful). Being unrecognized, they can have no meaning.

⁵³The word "history" in English has, unfortunately, two meanings; it often means the study and interpretation of the past, and it is sometimes used to mean the past itself. In this passage I will use the word "history" only in the former sense. When I speak of "creating history," I do not mean to imply that the interpretations that are created are "forgeries" or that they necessarily present a false image of the past—only that an image of the past is being formulated, an image that may be based in some measure on what is considered to be accurate evidence from and about the past.

⁵⁴I rely on the concept of the *arché* developed by the historian of religions Charles H. Long, which I heard him present in a lecture at a study conference on the origins of Islam held at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, in October 1986.

⁵⁵A brief, non-technical discussion of some of the many philosophical reflections bearing on the notion of "tradition" can be found in the essay "'Tradition' and Related Terms," which constitutes Chapter 6 of Nyíri, *Tradition and Individuality*, 61–74, esp. 73. See also Shils, *Tradition*.

of the *arché* seems to take place sometime around the 60s and 70s AH, which is when we first see evidence that Muslims began to point to the career of their Prophet, Muḥammad, as the crucial beginning-point of their community—that is, as their *arché*.

A second corollary of the necessity of context for meaning is that the crystallization of historical traditions is invariably associated with processes of community formation—whether of a religious community, a political community (such as a state or empire), or an intellectual community (such as a consciously articulated school of thought). The reason for this is that just as isolated events are meaningless, so isolated individuals, outside of any context (group) are meaningless. To be meaningful, we must be seen as part of a group, defined in some manner—be it a family, religion, clan, nation, political party, or some other association.⁵⁶

The writing of history, then, is a profoundly legitimizing activity, and one enmeshed in time-bound irony. *History is our way of giving what we are and what we believe in the present a significance that will endure into the future, by relating it to what has happened in the past.* Or, to be a bit more precise: to write history is to write about events in relation to their own past, in order to provide those events with significance that makes them worthy of being remembered in the future. The function of history is not only “to provide a specific temporal dimension to man’s awareness of himself;”⁵⁷ it is indeed to authorize a community’s very claim to legitimate existence. The creation of historical narratives is always, ultimately, an exercise in legitimation.

Historicizing Legitimation in the Islamic Tradition

As we have seen, earliest Islam—to judge from the Qur’ān, early maxims, and early inscriptions—was first and foremost a pietistic movement, one that was decidedly ahistorical in its outlook. The earliest

⁵⁶The case of the recluse who finds his existence meaningful does not, it seems to me, invalidate this point; for such recluses presumably see their significance in the dyadic group God-recluse (in the case of religious recluses), or in the context of a wider society to which they are found to have left writings of various kinds, or at the very least in the context of purely imaginary figures created from their own fantasies.

⁵⁷White, “The Burden of History,” 48.

Believers were quite unconcerned with recording "what had actually happened" in their community, because their interests as Believers were moral, not historical.⁵⁸ The rise of historical writing among the Believers thus constitutes a puzzle, for it was something that Believers undertook in spite of the original pietistic spirit of Muḥammad's movement, and perhaps even in opposition to it, rather than something that developed naturally from it.

Yet, as we know, Muslims *did* develop a powerful and highly diverse historiographical tradition. Indeed, the historicizing tendency in the Islamic community ultimately became so strong, and resulted in the production of such massive works, that the ahistorical character of the early community of Believers has generally been overlooked by most scholars. Blinded by the potent historicization to be found in the fully developed Islamic tradition, modern scholars have usually postulated that the earliest Believers already felt a concern for history, and have generally adduced two factors that, in their opinion, led to their first efforts at historical writing. The first of these factors was a presumed "innate historical curiosity" of the early Believers, and their consequent "natural" desire to record the facts of the community's "golden age"—the life and sayings of their Prophet, the events of the conquests and of the early caliphate—before memory of them died out.⁵⁹ The second factor was the assumed influence or example of the highly developed older traditions of historical writing in the Near East. Let us examine each of these factors in turn.

As far as "innate historical curiosity" is concerned, there can be little doubt that the earliest Believers, like all people, remembered as individuals many events that they had personally witnessed. Some of these memories were doubtless told to others—to children or other family members, or to associates of whatever kind—just as we all draw on our own stock of personal experiences and stories to enrich our daily

⁵⁸It is for the same reason that the pre-Islamic Arabs, who also essentially lacked a historical vision of their past, never recorded their own history as tribes (or as a "people," assuming they even thought of themselves in such terms.) The historicizing impulse/impetus simply was not there.

⁵⁹This may be what Khalidi means by "an awareness of history-in-the-making," see his *Arabic Historical Thought*, 18. See also Lichtenstadter, "Arabic and Islamic Historiography," which assumes such curiosity.

discourse with others. But individual memories are not history, which is communal and collective. Hence, the mere existence of memories of the past held by individual Believers is insufficient to explain why a historiographical tradition developed among Believers. Every society, after all, has stories that it tells, and every individual has more or less accurate memories of events personally witnessed; yet not every society develops a tradition of historical writing, much less one as sophisticated and elaborate as that which developed in the Islamic community.⁶⁰ In sum, the argument that Muslims developed an historical tradition because they were "curious" about their past fails to explain why and how such a concern for history arose at all in a community whose main orientation had been ahistorical.

There remains the question of earlier traditions of historical writing in the Near East, and their possible role in generating the rise of Islamic historiography. Muslims were not the first to write history, of course; by the time Islam appeared, the Near East had known several vibrant historiographical traditions. Jews had long before Islam developed an historical vision of their own place in the world and before God, a vision enshrined especially in the Pentateuch and historical books of the Old Testament. Graeco-Roman civilization had also developed sophisticated traditions of historical writing, and these two traditions were continued (and, in a sense, fused) in the writings of Christian historians of the Byzantine empire. The Sasanian empire also appears to have developed a tradition of royal annals or histories in Persian, although unfortunately few traces of it have survived to give us a clear idea of its character.

The early community of Believers thus existed in a cultural environment in which the "idea of history," if we may so call it, was in the air. It may therefore seem natural to assume that Islamic historical writing was inspired by these pre-Islamic historiographical traditions;⁶¹ but there are several reasons to believe that this was not the case. It is true, of course, that once the concept of history became firmly established in the Islamic community, Islamic historians sometimes turned

⁶⁰Further on the relationship of memory to history, see below, 138–41.

⁶¹Goldziher, for example, felt that Arabic historical writing derived its initial impulse from Persian historiography: see his "Islamisme et Parsisme," *idem*, "Historiography in Arabic Literature."

to the works of pre-Islamic historiographical traditions for specific information they deemed relevant. But the first impetus to write history among Believers could not have come from outside, but must have been generated *within* the community itself. This is so for two reasons. For one thing, to suppose that the mere exposure of a society to another society's historiographical tradition will generate historical writing in the former by way of imitation is a highly questionable general proposition. Dozens of societies around the Mediterranean and in the Near East (including those of pre-Islamic Arabia) were in a position to borrow the "idea of history" from the Jewish, Greek, Roman, or Persian traditions, after all, but over a period of a thousand years only a very few actually developed historiographical traditions of their own. Furthermore, the identity and timing of those societies that did borrow the "idea of history" from Hellenistic culture suggest that historical writing arose as an expression of communal self-awareness—as in the case of the Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian communities, which first developed historical traditions in the wake of their separation from orthodox Christianity because of their adherence to the Monophysite doctrine. The true impulse to write history, then, seems to arise within a society itself, and grows out of that society's own political development and its adoption of an ideology of communal identity. Before these things occur, the society in question, having no need of history, will simply ignore others' historical efforts as irrelevant scribblings.

In sum, neither the "innate historical curiosity" of the early Believers, nor the influence of alien historiographical traditions, is sufficient to explain the rise of Islamic historical writing. How, then, are we to account for it? Given the central importance that historical writing about their own origins eventually came to have in the Islamic community, it would seem logical to assume that it arose for reasons organically related to the development of the community itself, that it is the result of some impetus to record what Muslims knew or believed to be narratives about the origins of Islam. In other words, we must assume that these narratives were preserved because they were considered in some way valuable, for *history is always written because it is deemed useful in some way*. Although the earliest Believers appear to have been adherents of a pietistic movement whose central document was the Divine Word, they eventually developed a rich historiographi-

cal tradition because they discovered, in historical narration, a way of legitimizing the religious and political claims of their own community vis-à-vis the claims of other communities, and a way of legitimizing the claims of particular parties and groups within the community vis-à-vis other parties.⁶² This process we may call HISTORICIZING LEGITIMATION; it was a counterpart to the other forms of legitimation (pietistic, genealogical, and theocratic) discussed earlier.

Indeed, of all the various alternatives to the pious legitimation that had been the central concern of the early community of Believers, historicizing legitimation proved to be the most important to the subsequent history of the community. Through it, an appeal was made to historical facts or relationships (real or fictive) as a means of justifying one's claims to status or leadership in the community. In contrast to the essentially ahistorical outlook projected by the Qur'ān, this perception attached ultimate importance to particular events of the past, especially the recent past of the community of Believers itself—and not merely as didactic examples of a timeless pattern, as in the Qur'ān, but as unique happenings that bore implications for one's standing and claims to leadership in the community. A very simple example, raised here merely to make the point clear, would be the claims advanced by the Shī'a that Muḥammad had explicitly appointed 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib to be his successor as head of the community—an event described as having taken place during a stop at Ghadīr Khumm during the Prophet's final pilgrimage.⁶³ 'Alī's claim to lead the Believers, on the basis of this argument, was validated not by his piety (although, of course, the Shī'a never denied that 'Alī was virtuous, and even claimed that the

⁶²Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, 86–87, noting the upsurge in the third/ninth century of writing about the first decades of Islamic history, finds historical writing to be part of the “intellectual struggle” between those favoring an autocratic caliphate and those favoring limitation of caliphal authority through the *sharī'a*. He goes so far as to say that “Muslims normally express political theory in the form of history” (*ibid.*, 36–37).

⁶³For an overview of the incident at Ghadīr Khumm, see *EI* ², “Ghadīr Khumm” (L. Veccia Vaglieri), with references. Compare also accounts (not placed within the context of Ghadīr Khumm) that portray 'Alī as being recognized as the *walī* (guardian) of Muḥammad and all Believers after him, e.g. al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, V, 590–91 (no. 3712).

Prophet's designation was proof of his piety and virtue),⁶⁴ nor by his position as the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, but rather by a particular event—the Prophet's designation of 'Alī to succeed him. Moreover, narration of this particular event did more than establish 'Alī's claim to lead the community; by implication it also justified rejection by the later Shi'a of the legitimacy of 'Alī's three predecessors—Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān—on the grounds that they had usurped 'Alī's specific right to lead the community.⁶⁵ To repeat, the rejection of their claims was based not on considerations of their piety or genealogy, but rather hinged on what was presented as a specific event in the past, Muḥammad's designation of 'Alī. This focus on the immediate consequences and long-term meaning of a particular past event is the essence of historicizing legitimation.

This historical material, which as we shall see arose largely out of the various political and religious tensions that arose within the community of Believers, is vast in scope and in the variety of its contents, and will form the subject of Part II of this book. We can note briefly here, however, that the historicizing impulse often interacted with the other styles of legitimation described above (pious, genealogical, and theocratic) not only in ways that produced hybrid accounts, but also in ways that sometimes transformed the very nature of those forms of legitimation. Especially noteworthy in this respect is what we can term the *historicization of piety*—a process by which the Believers came to evaluate pious maxims with conflicting content by considering who was said to have first uttered them. In many cases, as recent work in the *ḥadīth* literature has shown,⁶⁶ pious maxims and other *akhbār* that originated with particular “holy men” or were of indeterminate origin were given greater authority by attaching them to earlier and

⁶⁴See Wensinck, *Handbook*, 15–17, s.v. “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib,” for a conspectus of accounts stressing 'Alī's piety and other virtues.

⁶⁵Of course, one can readily find accounts representing the opposite political claim; for a brief example, see 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, 101 (no. 281), in which 'Alī himself reports that the Prophet had referred to Abū Bakr and 'Umar as the “two chiefs of the people of paradise and the first and the last, after the prophets and apostles.”

⁶⁶Especially Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, e.g. 51–55 on the case of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; more generally, index under *raf'*.

more highly esteemed authorities ("raising" them—*rafʿ*—in the technical vocabulary of the science of *ḥadīth*), eventually to the Prophet himself. This process gave rise to the classical form of the *ḥadīth*: a text (*matn*) introduced by a chain of transmitters (*isnād*) leading back to the putative originator of the statement. What had happened in this development was a sort of inversion of the original situation. Whereas in the early years of the community of Believers, the pious content of a maxim had been self-legitimizing⁶⁷ and the maxims themselves were used to legitimize the claims or standing of particular individuals, by the heyday of *ḥadīth* study the *isnād* had come to validate the contents of the *ḥadīth*. That is, the maxim was now legitimized by the person who was said to have uttered it, particularly if that was the Prophet or an early Companion, rather than vice-versa. Piety continued to be important as a legitimizing factor, but it was supplanted by historicization as the dominant style of justifying various kinds of claims. The pious *ḥadīths* are considered legal precedent because they form the *sunna* of the Prophet—and a *sunna*, in theory at least, represents the record of a specific historical moment when the Prophet bestowed his approval on a particular practice. The very concept of *sunna*, around which all Islamic law revolves, is profoundly historicizing, even when the content of a specific *sunna* is profoundly moral/pietistic, or legal, or ritual.

It is possible to determine, at least in general terms, when this shift from pious to historicizing legitimation took place—but it is important to remember that such a shift would happen gradually over a period of, perhaps, fifty years or more, so there is little point in trying to date the change too closely. Three convergent lines of evidence, however, suggest that the shift began to be noticeable around the 60s or 70s AH (680s–690s CE). These lines of evidence are 1) the documentary record, 2) the date at which *isnāds* begin to be used, and 3) the date at which the Believers appear to be forging a separate and distinct confessional identity as Muslims. Let us review each of these quickly.

The Documentary Record. As we have seen above, the few surviving documents dating to the first century AH provide no evidence of any

⁶⁷Actually, the content of the maxims was legitimized in turn by implicit comparison with the Qurʾān and, especially, late antique concepts of piety (discussed above, 70–75, 90).

historicizing concern in the community of Believers until the late 60s and 70s AH. It is only around 70 AH, for example, that we see the first references to the Prophet Muḥammad or to specific events in the life of the community. As discussed extensively above, earlier documents reveal only an intense concern with piety on the part of the Believers—not with history.

The First Use of Isnāds. As we have noted above, the *isnād* or chain of informants introducing a particular account or saying can be seen as an historicizing device, so we can assume that the first use of *isnāds* in the Islamic tradition would take place when an historicizing mentality began to take shape in the community. The date at which *isnāds* were first used has been the subject of some debate. On the basis of an analysis of Ibn Ishāq's use of the *isnād*, Horovitz proposed a date of not later than 70 or 80 AH, whereas Schacht, departing from an account about the "great *fitna*," favored a later date, sometime during the first half of the second century AH.⁶⁸ Juynboll, however, re-analyzed the *fitna* account examined by Schacht and came to conclusions that support Horovitz's earlier dating of the *isnād*;⁶⁹ more recently, Juynboll has argued that *isnāds* were first used systematically by al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), and posits that the first appearance of "standardized *ḥadīth*" (that is, including *isnāds*) go back to the 70s or 80s AH: before this date was found only "still unstructured and still unstandardized material of edifying contents... or with a political slant,"⁷⁰ that is, what we have usually called pious maxims.

A Distinct Muslim Confessional Identity. As we shall see in Part II, some key themes of historicizing legitimation in the Islamic tradition are closely connected with the crystallization in the community of Believers

⁶⁸Horovitz, "Alter und Ursprung des Isnad;" Schacht, *Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence*, 36–37, 71–73. It is curious that Schacht, who is otherwise so skeptical about the veracity of just such statements, is here willing to accept this traditional account without hesitation. Moreover, Schacht's insistence that the *fitna* referred to in the account must mean the uprising against al-Walid ibn Yazid (d. 126/744), and not the Second Civil War (60–73/680–92), which is far more frequently designated as *fitna*, is never justified and is clearly self-serving, since throughout his book he strives to show that the *ḥadīth* material is late, mostly second century AH or later.

⁶⁹Juynboll, "The Date of the Great *Fitna*."

⁷⁰Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 17–23.

of a distinct and separate confessional identity as Muslims, a process that first becomes visible in documentary sources in the 70s AH.⁷¹

⁷¹On this development, see my article "From Believers to Muslims." Among the earliest pieces of documentary evidence for this change are the inscriptions, with stridently anti-Christian (or at least anti-Trinitarian) tone, in the Dome of the Rock, construction of which began in 72/692 (see Blair, "What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?").

PART II

THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORICAL WRITING

CHAPTER 4

THE CONTOURS OF THE EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

Introduction

In Part I, we attempted to trace certain concepts of central importance to the early community of Believers, starting with the Qur'ān and working forward chronologically. We concluded Part I with the proposition that narratives of Islamic origins—historical writing—first emerged in the Islamic community in the final third of the first century AH *as an exercise in legitimation*. In Part II, we will approach the problem of the origins narratives from the other direction; working backward from the extant narrative sources of the second/eighth and especially the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries—which constitute the bulk of the classical phase of Islamic historiography—we shall try to isolate and to identify more exactly the issues that induced Muslims first to write the history of Islamic origins. These narrative sources, dating from the second, third, and fourth centuries AH, are mostly compilations based on material derived from earlier collections (which may themselves have been assemblages of yet older materials). The content of these collections was unquestionably shaped in significant measure by the historiographical, polemical, and perhaps even the aesthetic goals of their compilers in the second–fourth centuries AH. In pursuit of these goals, the compilers favored certain kinds of material in making their selections from the accounts available to them, and

sometimes edited their material to make it fit more closely into the interpretive framework they wished to project. To some extent, therefore, the effort to discover what motivated the early generations of Muslims to compile their narratives of Islamic origins will inevitably be hampered by the interpretive goals of the later compilers who preserve the early accounts for us. We cannot, as several authors have pointed out, treat the later compilations as historiographically neutral repositories of "objective" information from which nuggets of early fact can simply be mined, without any understanding of the compilations themselves and the purposes behind them.¹ Most glaring is the paucity of serious studies of al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*;² some other works, such as those by al-Mas'ūdī,³ have received somewhat more attention, but many remain virtually unexamined. Careful study of these later compilations as literary and narrative creations should be an important goal of the current and future generations of scholars.

Nonetheless, we can attempt to discover the impulses that first led Believers to become interested in their own past and to elaborate it as history by examining the relative emphasis on or neglect of various topics in the Islamic historiographical tradition, as seen both in the earliest extant historical works (mid-second/eighth century) and in

¹Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians;" Waldman, *Toward a Theory of Historical Narrative*; Roberts, *Early Islamic Historiography*.

²Excellent background is provided by Rosenthal, "General Introduction," in *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, I, 5–154. This includes a voluminous biography of al-Ṭabarī and a complete list of his works, but no analysis of the contents of the *Ta'rikh*. Muth, *Die Annalen von al-Ṭabarī im Spiegel der europäischen Bearbeitungen*, surveys editions and Western scholarship, but offers little new on the conceptual basis of al-Ṭabarī's work. Further general comments are found in Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, 16–26 and Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 69–71. Stimulating preliminary observations are made by Hodgson, "Two Pre-Modern Muslim Historians;" also by Humphreys in *Islamic History*, 72–75; *idem*, "Qur'ānic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography;" *idem*, "The Odd Couple: al-Ṭabarī and Sayf b. 'Umar;" Roberts, *Early Islamic Historiography*; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 73–81. On sources, see Waines, *Abū Ja'far Ṭabarī and his Sources*, and the extensive and still useful study by 'Alī, "Maṣādir ta'rikh al-Ṭabarī."

³See Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography*; Shboul, *Al-Mas'ūdī and His World*. Cf. also Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, 627–66; 'Alī, "Maṣādir ta'rikh al-Mas'ūdī."

the culmination of this early historiographical tradition in the massive compilations of the third and fourth centuries AH. For it is clear that neither the early historiographical tradition as a whole nor any single compilation forming a part of it provides a uniform range of information on all subjects of potential interest; rather, we find that certain events and situations are discussed in great detail, while others that might seem at least as significant to us are passed over with merely a brief comment, or—not infrequently—ignored completely.⁴ This relative emphasis in the tradition provides us with a valuable key for unlocking the earliest impulses that caused Muslims first to become interested in history, and with an important tool in assessing the usefulness and reliability of the extant compilations on which modern historians must rely in their efforts to reconstruct the story of Islamic origins. In the remainder of this work, we shall, following Noth, call those subjects about which a great number of accounts are collected *historiographical themes*,⁵ and we shall designate as communal *issues* those concerns or debates that led the early Muslims to circulate and preserve reports clustered around these themes.

Thematic Balance in al-Ṭabarī's Annals

As a convenient starting-place in our effort to identify major themes of interest to the early Islamic historical tradition and the issues that generated them, we may consider the massive chronicle of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (*Annals of Apostles and Kings*), as an example of the Islamic historiographical tradition. Despite its relatively late date,⁶ al-Ṭabarī's chronicle is an appropriate representative for such analysis for several reasons. First, it is one of the main repositories of narratives about Islamic origins, certainly one of the half-dozen most important sources for the events of this period. Sec-

⁴Noted also by Humphreys, "Qur'ānic Myth and Narrative Structure," 275.

⁵Noth/Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*. See below, 144, for discussion of Noth's work on themes. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought* speaks loosely of the themes of sacred history, tribal history, and "world" history (e.g. 15, 30), but he is clearly using the term "theme" in a different, much broader sense than it is used by Noth or here.

⁶Late, that is, in relation to the events of Islamic origins about which the *Annals* relates so much, which occurred 250 to 300 years before the text was compiled.

ond, al-Ṭabarī's annalistic organization makes the historical themes he treats more readily visible than they are in works organized on a biographical or other basis. Third, Western scholars (and many Muslims as well) have generally considered al-Ṭabarī's presentation of early Islamic history to be quite typical of the mainstream view in the Islamic community, not too closely tied to the interests of any of the recognized sectarian groups, and often presenting divergent traditions representing conflicting points of view on the same episode. Consequently, it is reasonable to consider al-Ṭabarī's work as a representative product of the early Islamic historiographical tradition, if not, indeed, as the culmination and crowning glory of that tradition. In fact, we shall see in the next section that the main themes that form the focus of al-Ṭabarī's *Annals* are the very ones that predominate in most other surviving examples of Islamic historiography from the first three centuries.⁷

A rapid overview of the text of al-Ṭabarī reveals that most information in it is clustered around a limited number of main themes, about which massive detail is provided, while many other topics that might seem to us equally worthy of attention are given much less attention or ignored altogether. For example, al-Ṭabarī devotes ample space to the history of pre-Islamic kings of Iran, but very little to the history of Greece or Rome; he gives lengthy discussions of the history of the Old Testament prophets and the children of Israel, but passes quickly over Jesus and tales about the Christian community; he provides great detail on events in Iraq, especially al-Kūfa, during the First Civil War and Umayyad period, but provides much less on events in Syria during the same period, even though Syria was the central province from which the Umayyads ruled. He is relatively rich on Iran and skimpy on Egypt, much fuller on campaigns of conquest, even along the most distant borders in east and west, or on the course of certain small political uprisings than he is on such matters as taxation, commerce, industry, settlement, agriculture, social relations, or urban

⁷It cannot be denied that al-Ṭabarī had his own personal point of view, different from that of other compilers, or that his viewpoint is enshrined in the *Annals*, so on one level the *Annals* must be seen as a distinctive work, different from each of the other historical compilations of the early Islamic centuries. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the *themes* around which the work is structured (and hence much of the content as well) are the same ones found in the tradition at large.

organization, even in the Islamic “heartlands” of Iraq, Syria, Arabia, and Egypt.

Such a curious distribution of information can hardly be accidental, and is certainly not what one would expect to encounter if al-Ṭabarī’s fundamental reason for writing history had simply been curiosity about the past. Rather, it is the product of two factors. One, of course, is his own selectivity; he treated certain themes in greater detail than others because he was for some reason especially interested in them. The other factor was the availability of material to al-Ṭabarī—the range of information from which he could select. As we shall see, comparison of al-Ṭabarī’s material with that found in other compilations suggests that al-Ṭabarī himself had available to him not a body of accounts on all conceivable topics, but a mass of material that was in large measure already thematically shaped, with clear-cut topics of special emphasis and virtual silence on others.

The overarching structure of al-Ṭabarī’s chronicle appears to be dictated by a “story line” or master narrative⁸ that, from a Muslim perspective, traces the key episodes in the history of the human race and its relationship to God, and in the evolution of the Muslim community. The objective of this master narrative was to affirm the belief that the Islamic community was, in fact, the community of the true faith, and to explain how the Islamic community had reached the situation and circumstances it faced in al-Ṭabarī’s day.

Al-Ṭabarī’s master narrative includes the following main episodes, some of which form discrete subsections of the work, some of which are intermingled with others:

1. Creation of the world by God.
2. Successive revelations to humanity of God’s truth through the agency of prophets.
3. History of pre-Islamic empires, especially those of Iran.

⁸On the “master narrative” (or meta-narrative) as “a grand scheme for organizing the interpretation and writing of history,” see Appleby, Hunt, and Jacobs, *Telling the Truth about History*, 231–37; White, *The Content of the Form*, esp. 1–25, “The Value of Narrativity,” and 58–82, “The Politics of Historical Interpretation.”

4. History of the South Arabian kingdoms and of the pre-Islamic north Arabs, including the history of Mecca and Quraysh before Islam.
5. Life of the Prophet Muḥammad.
6. The succession of Abū Bakr and subsequent caliphs as leaders of the Islamic community.
7. The *ridda* wars (consolidation of power in Arabia) during the caliphate of Abū Bakr.
8. The Islamic conquests, during the caliphate of ‘Umar and later.
9. The civil wars dividing the Islamic community, including numerous rebellions against the oppressive Umayyads by Shī‘ī and Khārījī groups.
10. The overthrow of the Umayyads and accession of the Abbāsids, representing the family of the Prophet.
11. The reign of the ‘Abbāsids, including many rebellions against ‘Abbāsid authority by ‘Alids and others.
12. The succession of governors, commanders, and other officials that were the human embodiment of the Islamic state.

Al-Ṭabarī’s master narrative thus presents an organic historical explanation for the identity and role of the Muslim community in the third and fourth centuries AH. It explains how the community can see itself as the result of the application of God’s guidance in human affairs. It shows how earlier communities, led by prophets with the same message as that revealed to Muḥammad, went astray, making the Muslims unique in their adherence to the true law, even though the earlier prophets and their communities can be seen in a sense as forerunners of Muḥammad and the Islamic community. At the same time, this recounting of predecessors who went astray serves (as it does in the Qur’ān) as a tacit warning to Muslims to be mindful of their own behavior, lest they too stray as a community from the true path.

The narrative also establishes a special link between Islam and the people of Arabia, showing what their earlier (pre-Islamic) conditions had been and how they were delivered from their benightedness by the Prophet and the revelation of the Arabic Qur'ān. It describes the establishment of Muḥammad's community of pious Believers in Medina in the face of resistance by his erstwhile fellow-townsmen of Mecca, and traces the expansion of the community of Believers in the Islamic conquests, whose astounding success against overwhelming opposition is presented as a sign of God's favor. It shows how the caliphs, as rulers of a world-embracing empire established on the basis of these conquests, are the rightful heirs of earlier empires—especially those of Iran and Babylon, and to a lesser extent those of Alexander, Rome, and Byzantium.

Moreover, al-Ṭabarī's master narrative depicts the crucial phases in the history of the community since its inception in Medina. Because this history was not without its unsettled passages, as everyone was aware, al-Ṭabarī's narrative offers some explanation of how and why the painful disagreements among formerly united Believers arose, and what attitude to take on the various parties that emerged from the civil wars. Hence it portrays a "golden age" of unity under the first two caliphs and into the early years of the reign of 'Uthmān, a time when Muslims were able to work wonders, with God's backing, during the *ridḍa* and Islamic conquests. This was followed by the troubled periods of *fitna* or civil war, when Muslims began fighting one another openly for power and leadership. The Umayyads, whose rule was punctuated by Shī'ī and Khārijī efforts to overthrow them, were eventually ousted by the 'Abbāsids, representing the resurgence of the Prophet's clan of Banū Hāshim. Even under the 'Abbāsids, however, periodic rebellions occurred, usually mounted, as under the Umayyads, by the Shī'īs or Khārijīs. Al-Ṭabarī does not gloss over the sharp divisions within the Hāshimite family and the 'Abbāsid government, and it is not apparent on the surface whether he considered the 'Abbāsids a marked improvement over the Umayyads. In the latter parts of his work he seems to focus more closely on the corrupting effects of power, even in the hands of Hāshimites.

Other Historians' Master Narratives

Al-Ṭabarī is, of course, only one compiler, and we must assume that every compiler of historical accounts in the Muslim community had his own agenda or interpretation to present, which will differ from that of al-Ṭabarī on many points. But a quick survey of some of the more important works can give some idea of the character of their respective master narratives.

Some of these works are limited to one, or a few, of the chapters found in al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*. For example, the *Sīra* of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq⁹ (d. 151/768) contains only information on the life of the Prophet, introduced by some material on pre-Islamic Arabia. (It is virtually the same as the corresponding parts of al-Ṭabarī, who relied mainly on another recension of Ibn Ishāq for information about the life of the Prophet.)¹⁰ The *Kitāb al-maghāzī* of al-Wāqidi¹¹ (d. 207/823) limits itself even more than Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, focusing only on the events of the Prophet's years in Medina. The extensive *Kitāb al-futūḥ* or "Book of Conquests" of Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī (d. early fourth/tenth century or earlier) is, as its title suggests, focused on the subject of how the early Islamic state expanded through military conquest, but also provides some information about the history of the caliphs.¹² The *Futūḥ al-buldān* of al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), as its title suggests, concentrates on accounts of the conquest of various places, a subject also treated extensively by al-Ṭabarī, not only in the large continuous sections de-

⁹Ibn Ishāq, in the recension of al-Bakkā'ī, as redacted by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*. On this work see Sellheim, "Prophet, Chalif, und Geschichte;" Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 33–38; *idem*, *Dirāsa fī sīrat al-nabī*; Watt, "The Reliability of Ibn Ishāq's Sources;" Khoury, "Les sources islamiques de la 'Sīra.'" I have not been able to secure a copy of As-Samuk, *Die historischen Überlieferung nach Ibn Ishāq*.

¹⁰Ibn Hishām received Ibn Ishāq's material in the recension of Ziyād ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Bakkā'ī; al-Ṭabarī, in the recension of Salama ibn Faḍl al-Anṣārī. Several other recensions of Ibn Ishāq's collection existed, which are lost or survive only in fragments.

¹¹On him see Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 37–39; Jones, "Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidi."

¹²Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 329, puts his death date as "possibly 314/926;" M.A. Shaban, in *EI*², "Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī," implies that he died considerably earlier. See also Kurat, "Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad B. A'tham al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*."

voted to the early conquests during the caliphates of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, but also in passages on the later conquests that are found scattered through subsequent volumes of his history. Al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ* offers much fuller information on early administrative institutions than does al-Ṭabarī, however.

Other works purport to be comprehensive in their scope, like al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*. The "thematic balance" in al-Balādhurī's other work, his huge *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, is difficult to judge, because only part of the work has been published and because it is organized genealogically. Nevertheless, we can see from the table of contents of the complete work¹³ that it places overwhelming emphasis on accounts of those members of Quraysh who competed for the caliphate: the struggles for power among Umayyads, 'Abbāsids, Ṭālibids, and Zubayrids are reported very fully, with significant information on rebellions of Khārijīs during the first century AH. The Umayyads are, in particular, fully described. Altogether, this material, focused primarily on Quraysh and the caliphate, accounts for almost three-quarters of the work. Even accounting for the fact that material on other tribal groups and other issues sometimes is included in the entries for a caliph, this material is much less extensive than that on Quraysh and the caliphate; the section (still unpublished) on the important Ḥijāzī tribe of Thaqīf, for example, runs to only about 50 folios, despite their major role in the early history of the community of Believers.

The earliest surviving annalistic history, the *Ta'rikh* of Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt (d. ca. 240/854),¹⁴ although much briefer than al-Ṭabarī would later be, seems to follow much the same program, except that he omits all information on pre-Islamic matters. After a brief discussion of methods of dating, he thus begins his chronicle with the birth and career of the Prophet Muḥammad, and proceeds to provide accounts about the campaigns of conquest, the civil wars, rebellions of Khārijīs, etc.; his information on the 'Abbāsids, though substantial, is thinner

¹³This is found in the introduction to Ḥamīd Allāh's edition of Volume I of the work, 34–53, with references to the folio numbers of the Istanbul manuscripts (Reisülküttāp Mustafa Efendi nos. 597–98, now in the Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi). On the *Ansāb al-ashrāf* see also Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 58–61.

¹⁴On him and his work, see *EI* ², "Ibn Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī" (S. Zakkār).

than that on the Umayyad period. Like al-Ṭabarī, Khalīfa also provides some information on administrative appointments.

The *Ta'rikh* of al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897),¹⁵ a universal history like al-Ṭabarī's, is known for its moderate Shī'ī orientation; this shows up, for example, in the way the author speaks of the "days" (*ayyām*, i.e. "secular" reign) of Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and of the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd rulers, reserving the term "caliphate" (*khilāfa*) for the reigns of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and his son al-Ḥasan. Historical episodes of particular interest to the Shī'a, such as the death of the various 'Alid *imāms*, are also somewhat highlighted. Al-Ya'qūbī appears to have been very interested in matters of administration, and provides more information about it than does al-Ṭabarī, despite the latter's vastly greater bulk. He also evinces a broader outlook, providing information on some topics which al-Ṭabarī passes over in silence, such as China, India, and ancient Egypt.¹⁶ Despite his distinctive point of view, however, Ya'qūbī treats many themes similar to those found in al-Ṭabarī; the overwhelming bulk of his narrations deal with pre-Islamic history and prophecy, the life of Muḥammad, the conquests, the civil wars, the caliphate, and matters of administration. This similarity in focus with al-Ṭabarī's work sometimes exists even when al-Ya'qūbī's emphasis appears to be different; for example, he apparently has much more material on Greece and Rome, proportionally, than does al-Ṭabarī, but most of this material deals not with history, but with literature and culture—such as by providing summaries of the contents of some famous Greek works.¹⁷

Al-Dīnawarī's *Al-Akḥbār al-ṭiwāl*¹⁸ has a narrative far more closely centered on Iran and Iraq than al-Ṭabarī's or al-Ya'qūbī's. It includes nothing on the Islamic conquests of Syria, Egypt, or the Maghrib, but

¹⁵On him and his work, see *EI* ², "Al-Ya'qūbī" (C. Brockelmann); Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 64–67; Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, 11–15; Millward, "Al-Ya'qūbī's Sources and the Question of Shī'a Partiality."

¹⁶See Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, 15 and (for comparison with al-Ṭabarī) 26.

¹⁷Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 133, notes that al-Ya'qūbī generally falls back on cultural history (i.e. the description of surviving literary works) when he lacks significant information on political history.

¹⁸On him and his work, see *EI* ², "Al-Dīnawarī" (B. Lewin); Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 68–69; Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung*, 9–11.

has considerable detail on conquests in Iraq and Iran, against the Sasanians. It is also very full on political opposition to the Umayyads by the Shī'a and on political events affecting Iran, as well as on the history of Iran before Islam. It is less full on pre-Islamic prophets, and curiously enough, does not treat the life of the Prophet Muḥammad at all, skipping directly from clashes of the pre-Islamic Arabs with the Sasanians to accounts of the conquests on the eastern front;¹⁹ it mentions the Prophet only in reference to comparing dating systems.²⁰ Over one-third of the text covers events of the Umayyad period, but in doing so very little attention is paid to the Umayyads themselves, the information provided bearing mainly on Shī'i and Khārījī uprisings against the Umayyads and on conquests in the eastern provinces. It also offers relatively rich material on Alexander's supposed exploits and on Biblical, Persian, and pre-Islamic Arabian history.

The *Kitāb al-ta'rikh* of the Andalusian scholar 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/852)²¹ offers a summary survey of early Islamic history which, despite its difference in scope, focuses on many of the same concerns as those treated in the other works just described.²² He seems to have had a special interest in cultic and administrative history, on which he makes brief remarks periodically; and, with the late Umayyad period, his work turns its attention resolutely to the history of al-Andalus and to the biographies of *hadīth* scholars.

Even in works where the very focus of concern might lead us to expect a dramatically different balance of information, we find our expectations largely disappointed. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbārūhā*, for example, certainly concentrates on Egypt (and to a

¹⁹"The Prophet is mentioned so to speak in a marginal note of the history of Anūsharwān; the Umayyads are treated with only as far as the religious and political movements involving the eastern part of Islam are concerned, etc." (Lewin, "Al-Dīnawarī").

²⁰Al-Dīnawarī, *Al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, 74.

²¹On him see Jorge Aguadé, "Vida y obra de 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb," an introduction accompanying his edition of Ibn Ḥabīb, *Ta'rikh*. The judgment of A. Huici Miranda, in *ET* 2, "Ibn Ḥabīb," that the work is of "little value," is certainly to be rejected.

²²Creation, revelation, various prophets (Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Lot, Abraham, David, Solomon, Jesus, etc.), pre-Islamic history of Quraysh, Muḥammad, then annalistic arrangement with emphasis on acts of caliphs, etc.

much lesser extent, North Africa), as its title suggests, but a closer look at its contents shows an emphasis on some familiar themes: Old Testament prophets and history as related to Egypt (e.g. Joseph in Egypt), and the Islamic conquest of Egypt and North Africa (almost half the work's bulk). A sizable portion of the book is devoted, moreover, to biographies of judges and of Companions of the Prophet who lived in Egypt. Altogether, this material accounts for about two-thirds of the book. The remainder does provide some detailed information, not found elsewhere, on Egypt's administration, geography, and settlement in the early period.

Even a text such as the brief *Kitāb* of the Khārījī author Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī (d. after 273/887)²³ concentrates on the same basic events as al-Ṭabarī and other Sunnī authors, although it gives events a distinctive interpretive coloring.²⁴ Much the same is true of the apparently early Khārījī text, *Sīrat Sālim ibn Dhakwān*;²⁵ although it offers a distinctive reading of the Islamic origins story in accordance with Ibādī Khārījī doctrine, the general course of events in early Islamic history that it describes is the same as that of other sources.²⁶

Although it is more difficult to analyze it by thematic categories, the content of large biographical compilations such as the *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt* of Muḥammad ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) and the *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq* of 'Alī ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176) gives the impression of being focused on much the same kind of material; new details and bits of information on particular events are found, to be sure, but generally one feels that the same themes and issues are being worked.

²³*Kitāb Ibn Sallām* (ed. Schwartz and Ibn Ya'qūb).

²⁴Khārījī histories are few, spare, and late, and tell us little new about Islamic origins. This may stem from the early Khārījīs' single-minded focus on piety. Khārījī historiography really develops later, with works that dwell especially on the origins of the Khārījī communities in the Maghrib.

²⁵*Sīrat Sālim ibn Dhakwān* (fols. 154*-94 of the "Hinds xerox" manuscript held by Cambridge University Library). I am grateful to the late Dr. Martin Hinds, who with his customary generosity arranged to have a copy of the relevant parts of the "Hinds xerox" sent to me on microfilm in the autumn of 1987, and to Cambridge University Library for making the microfilm available to me. The text is studied in part in Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, 23-47, 89-103.

²⁶Muḥammad, Qur'ān revealed, Abū Bakr, 'Umar (but no mention of *ridda* or conquests), mutiny against 'Uthmān, battles of Camel and Ṣiffīn, etc.

In very general terms, then, it is fair to say that virtually the whole surviving corpus of historical writing on early Islamic history produced by Muslims during the first three centuries showed a marked tendency to favor certain themes over others, providing much fuller information on topics such as the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, the campaigns of conquest, the struggles of 'Alid rebels in Iraq against the Umayyads, etc., than on others such as land tenure, events in Syria or Egypt, etc. This appears to be true, moreover, regardless of the sectarian orientation (Sunnī, Shī'ī, Khārījī) of the compilers. Their sympathies show up in the kind and tone of individual accounts related on relevant topics, but not usually in a different set of topics or even in a significantly different level of emphasis on the various topics. Hence it is clear that the emergence of these themes antedates the efforts of the compilers of the late second and third centuries AH. That is, it appears that the earliest purveyors of historical material themselves tended to concentrate on certain select themes. This meant that the body of accounts from which later compilers, such as al-Ṭabarī, could select their material was already very much thematically shaped.²⁷

This suggests that what the extant compilations offer us are various reworkings of what must be seen as original themes of the earliest historiographical tradition. That is, the compilers—al-Ṭabarī, al-Balādhurī, etc.—inherited from their predecessors a large number of historical (or pseudo-historical) accounts that were already clustered around these developing themes, and while they could and certainly did convey this material selectively, and could rearrange it and shift the emphasis within it to some extent, they were essentially powerless to change the general thematic outlines of early Islamic history. This may have been because there was probably very little other evidence on which they might build a radically divergent interpretation. Supposing, for example, a historian like al-Ṭabarī had wished to construct a picture of early Islamic history with a focus on the economic relations among clans of Quraysh and other tribes, what could he use as evidence? Perhaps they did succeed in some areas—e.g. information on

²⁷This argument and that of the next paragraph follow that of Noth/Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 7–110.

ṣā'ifa raids and governorships may have come from administrative documents to which they had access—but for most questions, no sources were available, or no evidence exists that they were used.²⁸ No one had thought to collect information on those themes for early Islam. In any case, such speculation disguises the probability that the predominance of the original historiographical themes shaped the historical outlook of writers like al-Ṭabarī so completely that it was practically impossible for them to conceive Islamic history in any dramatically different way.²⁹ The “historical agenda,” so to speak—the community’s master narrative—was already set by the time the compilations that now survive were written in the second and third centuries AH. The “universal histories” are less independent compilations than composites of thematic groups.

Our first step in reconstructing the rise of the tradition of historical writing in the Islamic community, then, must be to examine more closely the main themes with which early Islamic historians concerned themselves, and to consider the issues that underlie these themes. Before doing so, however, it is appropriate to make a few brief comments on the general subject of the writing of history and its relation to communal identity.

Memory and History

When discussing the themes of early Islamic historiography in the following chapters, it will be important to remember also that there is a difference between history, which is a collective undertaking, and memory, which is borne by individuals.³⁰ As we have seen, the community

²⁸How we would like to have, for example, a detailed treatise by an early historian on the evolution of landholding or settlement or commerce in a given town during the first century, and based on archival records.

²⁹Indeed, even Western students of early Islamic history have had marked difficulty breaking the grip of the traditional outlook (on this phenomenon, see Epilogue, below). I do not mean to imply here that the information in the traditional accounts is necessarily “wrong,” merely that Western historians view early Islamic history in much the same political and religious terms as those that have dominated Islamic historiography itself: caliphate/imāmate, Muslim vs. non-Muslim, Arabs vs. Iranians, etc.

³⁰On the relationship between history and memory I have found the following particularly useful: Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*; Halbwachs, *On Col-*

of Believers did not begin to develop an historical view of itself until late in the first century AH; in other words, until that time it appears that the Believers had no *collective* vision of their own origins *as a community*. *Memory* is the residue in an individual's mind of the actual events of some past time. Communities have no minds; hence, there can be no such thing as "communal memory" or "collective memory," other than in a metaphorical sense.³¹ Instead, communities develop *collective images* or *collective visions* of their past—what can be called *history*. Such a collective vision of the past may develop when a number of people in a community share memories of certain past events, and recount their memories of these events to one another. But each of these memories remains that of an individual; several people may remember witnessing one and the same event, but each person's memory of even the simplest event will be unique—slightly different, and sometimes markedly different, from the memories of all others. A complex phenomenon comprising many separate events (a large battle, for example, or a social movement) may be remembered in part by a large number of people, each of whom, having experienced only a part of the whole, will remember only a certain aspect of it. The formation of collective visions of the past by members of a community thus involves a process of *mediation*, during which the memories of various individuals are shared, combined, and adjusted in the light of one another to produce the collective vision of an event.³²

Two things should be made clear about the process of mediation. First, it is obvious that individuals' memories are seldom, if ever, the same as the collective vision of a community, however closely the latter may be based on the former, if for no other reason than because the collective vision is broader and more inclusive than any individual's memories. In most cases, moreover, the collective vision of the community will go significantly beyond the memories of any particular individual, and perhaps diverge from them. If the divergence is sharp enough, of course, it may lead individuals to break with the commu-

lective Memory; Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*; and, though somewhat tangentially, Lowenthal's wonderful *The Past is a Foreign Country*.

³¹This definition of memory here differs especially from that of Halbwachs.

³²Fentress and Wickham seem to be referring to this process when they state that social memory is constituted "by talking about it" (ix-x).

nity. Second, the mediation process is required even to define what constitutes an event—what its parameters and boundaries are—from the communal point of view. Further mediation takes place only after the members of a community have collectively agreed that certain events in the past are significant for the community as a whole. (In the case of early Islamic historiography, we may relate this communal agreement to the identification of historiographical themes.) Once such agreement has been reached, the memories of individuals can be integrated, as much as possible, into the community's collective vision to forge its *history*. Until a certain event or set of events in the past has been collectively identified as significant, on the other hand, the community will have no reason to perpetuate an individual's memories of that event. Individual members of the community will make no effort to seek out such memories from other members, individuals will have no particular incentive to relate those memories to others in the community, and if they are related to others in the absence of a validating framework, such memories are likely to be viewed by others in the community as trivia—irrelevant curiosities, meaningless to communal life.

In the formation of historiographical traditions, however, the fact that individuals usually belong simultaneously to several overlapping communal groupings is of utmost importance. (For example, a person may identify himself simultaneously as being a member of a certain family, of a certain clan or tribe, of a certain village or town, of a certain profession or trade, of a certain religion, of a certain ethnic group, etc.) Each of these groups or subcommunities will have its own vision of the past—of *its* past, its history.³³ Some of these visions of the past will be rudimentary; others will be much more elaborate. (Families and villages, for example, seldom develop coherent visions of the past to the same level of sophistication as do organized religions or states.) Because the overlapping communities to which a single individual may belong

³³"It is characteristic of the early [Islamic] historical writings, without ever being expressly stated, to regard history as one of the principal forms by means of which not only small regional or confessional groups, but even the Community, itself, acquired consciousness of identity as a whole." (Cahen, "History and Historians," 191.)

have different visions of the past, however, an individual's memory of a particular event—and, ultimately, the event itself—may be significant in the view of one (sub-) community, and irrelevant to another community. For example, an episode that has special meaning for a particular family or village may not—at least at first—be considered noteworthy by a broader community; memories of that episode might then be perpetuated as collective visions only by members of that family or village, but neglected entirely by some larger community to which the individual belonged. Certain events in the collective vision of one community may, however, become relevant to another community much later if circumstances are right. For example, if an individual from a certain family or village establishes a new ruling dynasty in a kingdom, the collective visions of his family may be integrated into the collective visions of the kingdom, even though for centuries beforehand the kingdom had had no interest in the events related in that family's collective vision. Indeed, the perpetuation of a collective vision by a communal "interest group" within a larger community (an opinion group within a religious community, for example) may, over time, eventually cause the larger community to adopt, in part and belatedly, the collective vision of the lesser "interest groups."³⁴ Moreover, the tensions and conflicts that develop between smaller communities within the matrix of a larger one may be of crucial importance in the initial crystallization of legitimizing narratives. The existence of communities-within-communities, then, provides an important basis for the birth, growth, and transformation of communal visions of the past, and may explain in part why full-blown historiographical traditions arise mainly, if not only, in large and highly complex communities.

Themes and Issues in the Early Islamic Narrative Tradition

As we have seen, it is the fact that a community or group identifies certain events in its past as having special meaning that leads to the elaboration of a tradition of historical writing within that community.

³⁴As many readers will realize, this is precisely what has happened in recent years in the United States of America, where the rise of political and civil rights movements among Native Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics has resulted in the integration of aspects of each of those communities' collective visions into the (once overwhelmingly Anglocentric) "master narrative" of American history.

Indeed, it is often part of the process by which a community creates its own self-identity. Of course, the identification of key events may be part of a reciprocal process, in which the first stirrings of communal consciousness begin to adumbrate certain historically meaningful events, and the increasingly sharp focus on those events helps in turn to further solidify the feelings of communal identity, and so on. Eventually, the gathering of information on crucial events results in the growth of historiographical themes, or clusters of accounts on communally crucial events and phenomena.

In terms of function, these themes (and the events³⁵ bundled in them) may be categorized into three groups: THEMES OF THE ARCHÉ, PREPARATORY THEMES, and BOUNDARY THEMES:

THEMES OF THE ARCHÉ or retrospective origination-point of the community (which we will also call, in the following pages, themes of INCEPTION)³⁶ include events that define the community temporally and to some extent in terms of essential identity or ideology. In Islamic historiography, examples would be accounts that narrated Islam's original distinctness from both Arabian paganism and from Judaism, Christianity, and other monotheisms—in particular, accounts about the Prophet Muḥammad; in American history, they would include stories narrating the events of the American Revolution.

PREPARATORY THEMES embrace events that are seen as anticipations of the *arché*. In Islamic tradition, examples would be accounts about the “Old Testament” prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān, who serve as distant prefigurations of the Prophet Muḥammad, and reports about figures such as Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who is a Believer before the arrival of the dispensation in which he is to believe; in American history, they would include events such as

³⁵I refer in this paragraph consistently to “events,” as a shorthand for “events, institutions, and situations,” for many historical accounts relate phenomena that can only with difficulty be termed events.

³⁶I rely on the concept of the *arché* developed by the historian of religions Charles H. Long, which I heard him present at a study conference on the origins of Islam held at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, in October 1986.

the Boston Tea Party, which prefigure the revolution that, with perfect hindsight, we can now see was coming.³⁷

BOUNDARY THEMES comprise events that define the community or group in relation to others. These may be of three kinds. One kind consists of events that are taken as affirmations of the community's distinct identity, or represent affirmations of key aspects of the community's identity. The most obvious are conflicts with other communities—whether the Muslims' campaigns against the Byzantines, or American involvement in the War of 1812 or the Cold War; somewhat less obvious is the continuity of certain key institutions, such as the caliphate or the presidency, that are integral to the community's self-definition. The second and third kinds of boundary events relate to matters *within* the community. The second marks the boundary between one group and another that shares the same *arché*; in the Islamic tradition, an obvious example would be the massacre of 'Alids at Karbalā' during the Second Civil War, which became decisive in the creation of a distinct identity among Shī'ī Muslims (who, nonetheless, share with Sunnī Muslims the common Islamic *arché* identified with the career of the Prophet Muḥammad); in American history, an event like the founding of the Republican Party (which established a special identity for a particular subset of Americans) could be seen in this light. Boundary events of the third kind are seen as decisions within the community henceforth to pursue a particular ideological choice or course of action. An example in Islamic historiography is the Abbāsīd revolution, portrayed generally as a decisive turn by the community away from the oppression of the Umayyad dynasty, and toward more self-consciously Islamic rule under the 'Abbāsīds; an obvious example in the American context would be the struggle over slavery and abolition, including the Civil War.

A community's collective vision of the past is thus articulated in historiographical themes focusing on and connecting these key events; indi-

³⁷My notion of "preparatory themes" may correspond to what Voegelin has termed "historiogenesis." See Voegelin, *Order and History*, IV: *The Ecumenic Age*, 59–113.

vidual accounts and episodes are clustered around these themes. The discussion of historiographical themes in the Islamic tradition was pioneered by Albrecht Noth.³⁸ Noth divides the themes broadly into two groups, which he calls “primary” and “secondary” themes. In his usage, primary themes are those that represent original concerns of the earliest transmitters of historical accounts, whether they were contemporary with the events described or somewhat later; secondary themes, on the other hand, are not among these original concerns, but rather reflect concerns of later transmitters, generated purely as elaborations of material from the primary themes, with no direct line of independent transmission to the events described. His point is that we must seek authentic historical information only from the primary themes.³⁹ This distinction has a certain cogency, but too rigid a division of the material into “primary” and “secondary” themes seems to me artificial and sometimes misleading; many early themes continued to evolve and grow for some time after their first appearance, so that it might be more natural to speak of a “primary” theme growing into “secondary” ones, or sprouting “secondary” interests. For this reason, I dispense with the identification of themes as primary or secondary, and concentrate instead on attempting to establish roughly when particular themes first emerged and, when possible, how they evolved.

In the first sections of this chapter, we have already identified in a general way some of the historiographical themes that make up the Islamic community’s origins narratives. In subsequent chapters, our goal will be to look more closely at a number of these themes, with a view to describing their range and content, approximately when and where in the community they first emerged, and their function in the life of the community.⁴⁰ As we shall see, the themes of the Islamic origins narratives address four basic issues, which we shall designate PROPHECY, COMMUNITY, HEGEMONY, and LEADERSHIP.⁴¹ Most of these themes

³⁸Noth/Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 26–61.

³⁹I am indebted to Lawrence I. Conrad for helpful comments on Noth’s conception of historiographical themes.

⁴⁰What, in Biblical criticism, is usually called their “setting in life” (*Sitz im Leben*).

⁴¹We may wish to identify also a fifth issue, ENTITLEMENT, that motivated some historical accounts—particularly some that deal with taxation, administrative priv-

of the early Islamic narrative tradition appear to have been firmly established by the mid-second century AH—in some cases, considerably earlier. After that time, the purveyors of narratives of Islamic origins continued to develop the material by reorganizing, recombining, or reinterpreting it, and (occasionally) by introducing completely new concerns.

We must note here that fixing the date and place at which each of the themes discussed in the following chapters first emerged is by no means an exact science. Because the extant accounts often survive only in later compilations (third–fourth centuries AH or later), it is often difficult to be sure when accounts of a certain kind first came into wide circulation. One general indicator that we shall use in our effort to pin down when particular themes first emerged is to consider reports of the earliest authors or compilers of discrete books on certain themes, even though the “books” themselves are no longer extant and may survive only in fragmentary form as quotes in later works, or not at all.⁴² It is, of course, often an open question whether the author of a supposed early, lost work—for example, ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/713), said to be the first to have written a *sīra* or biography of Muḥammad—actually wrote a discrete “book,” or only gathered and maintained a collection of written notes on the subject which he transmitted, perhaps only in oral form, to his students. As we have noted in the Introduction, this subject has been extensively debated by scholars over the past several decades.⁴³ As important as this debate is, however, it is immaterial for our present purposes. From the point of view of the coalescence of historiographical or narrative themes, it does not matter whether the material is gathered as a discrete and strictly delimited book, or only as a collection of notes on that topic; in either case, the topic has clearly become the focus of concentrated attention by the author or transmitter, and the existence of the theme has to be assumed either

ileges (such as being on the *dīwān*), etc. Most such accounts can also be seen as stemming from the issue of Community (especially within the themes “cult and administration” and “taxation”), where they have been categorized here.

⁴²The most important aids in this survey are GAS, I, and Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*. For many themes, the best discussion to date is found in Noth/Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 26–61.

⁴³See above, 16–18, on oral vs. written transmission.

way. Later authors may have ascribed “books” to early traditionists who only collected and passed on accounts on a certain subject; so, to go back to our example, the fact that no books on the *sīra* are attributed to anyone before ‘Urwa’s activity in the last third of the first century AH probably means also that before his time no one was actively gathering and maintaining accounts on the Prophet’s biography, even as collections of notes. It thus seems reasonable to take references to the earliest authors of discrete “books” on particular topics as a rough indicator of at least the relative dates of emergence of the themes to which these books belonged.⁴⁴

Let us, then, turn to consider the specific issues and themes.

⁴⁴See Appendix A below, 297–306, for a chronological list of early texts.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES OF PROPHECY

THE QUESTION OF PROPHECY became one of the main issues shaping the Islamic historiographical tradition. For Muslims, the career of their Prophet and the revelation to him of God's Qur'ān, their holy book, came to be seen as the decisive events in all of human history, and certainly in the life of their community. Yet, as we have seen,¹ the earliest Believers do not appear to have attached much importance to recording details of the Prophet's life, even though many individuals may have cherished memories of their own contacts with the Prophet. Their primary concern, rather, had been on living in accord with the moral and pietistic content of God's message to the Believers, not on recording the particulars of how that message had been communicated.

In view of this initial lack of historical concern, it is no surprise that there is no record of the compilation of a *sīra*, or biography, devoted to the Prophet before the end of the first century AH.² Until this time—roughly the last third of the first century AH—the community of Believers was presumably identified, and identified itself, not so

¹Chapter 2 above.

²The early development of works on the Prophet's life is the subject of an extensive bibliography. Useful information is found in Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*; Horovitz, "Earliest Biographies of the Prophet" (dated but still useful); Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I: *Historical Texts*; Kister, "Sirah Literature;" Jones, "Maghāzī Literature." Fuat Sezgin, *GAS*, I, 275–302, catalogs early authors/compilers and works.

much by its association with the Prophet Muḥammad, as by its pious dedication to the Qur'ān as God's revelation. The first compilation devoted to the life of Muḥammad of which we find mention is a lost *sīra* or *maghāzī* work attributed to 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/713).³ From about 'Urwa's time, or shortly thereafter, we find attributions of other compilations: a lost *Sīra* of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713), which was used by al-Ṭabarī, and the *maghāzī* works (i.e. accounts of the Prophet's campaigns) of 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ka'b (d. 97/716), Ābān ibn 'Uthmān (d. ca. 100/718), and 'Āmir ibn Sharāḥīl al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721). The earliest extant fragment of a compilation dealing with the life of Muḥammad seems to be an excerpt on papyrus from the *maghāzī* work of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114/732).⁴ (Of course this, too, may really be a section of Wahb's notes on the subject.) An unidentified scholar's notes on the battle of Badr, one of the key events in the life of Muḥammad, has survived in another papyrus fragment that probably dates no later than the early second century AH.⁵ Even the *maghāzī* work (or collection of notes?) of the great Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), who appears to have been more than anyone else responsible for establishing the outlines of the Prophet's biography from accounts derived from 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Utba (d. in the 90s AH), and many others, does not survive as a discrete text, although many excerpts from it survive in later works.⁶ The earliest extant biography is the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767 or 151) in the recension of al-Bakkā'i, as redacted by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/834).⁷

³For references to this work, see the introduction to al-A'zamī, ed., *Maghāzī rasūl Allāh*, 57–58; the passages supposedly from 'Urwa's text, culled from later sources, are found at 100–230.

⁴Published in Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, I, 117–75.

⁵Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, 82–84.

⁶Some of these are gathered in al-Dūrī, *Baḥṭh fī nash'at 'ilm al-ta'rikh*, Part 2 (not included in the English translation). Zuhri's accounts in later works and the sources on which he relied for his information are tabulated and analyzed in 'Aṭwān, *Al-Riwāya al-ta'rikhiya*, 116–79. See also Duri, "Al-Zuhri."

⁷As noted above (132 n. 9), Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* is also preserved in large measure in al-Ṭabarī's *Annals* in the recension of Salama ibn Faḍl al-Anṣārī. It includes material not only relating to the theme of *nubūwa*, but also to the themes of *umma* and Qur'ān-related narratives (below, 149–59, 160–66).

When it did crystallize, the issue of prophecy was articulated historiographically in two themes, which we shall designate *nubūwa* and Qur'ān-related narratives.

Nubūwa

The theme we shall designate *nubūwa* (Arabic for “prophecy”) embraces accounts that address directly Muḥammad’s status as prophet or apostle, the nature of his apostolic mission, and his membership in the long chain of apostles sent by God to various communities.⁸ In a sense, such accounts thus deal with Muḥammad’s relationship with God. It is a theme of INCEPTION, because Muḥammad’s prophetic career represents in Islamic historiography the *arché* or mythical starting-point in the evolution of the earthly community of Muslims. The fact that an important aspect of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission was the creation of a new community means that many accounts about him belong simultaneously to the themes of *nubūwa* and *umma* (community), treated in the next chapter.⁹

In view of the early Believers’ concern with morality and piety, rather than with history, and considering the absence of any positive record to the contrary, it seems likely that the theme of *nubūwa* first developed in earnest as the Believers began to think of themselves as constituting a separate religious community as Muslims, distinct from Christians and Jews.¹⁰ Since Muslims, Christians, and Jews all shared belief in one God, the Last Judgment, revelation of God’s word, etc., the most obvious marker of this separate Muslim identity was the Muslims’ acceptance of Muḥammad as God’s apostle or prophet.¹¹ For among the matters on which Jews and Christians certainly must have chal-

⁸But not the stories of those earlier prophets themselves. *Nubūwa* in our usage corresponds roughly to what Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 27, terms *mab’ath* literature. An important recent study of what I here call the *nubūwa* theme, including a more detailed articulation of different sub-themes that constituted it, is Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*.

⁹For example, an account in which Muḥammad is presented in the archetypically prophetic role of lawgiver could also be classified as a report concerned with the definition of the *umma* or community, because it was observance of the law that defined the community behaviorally. See below, 160–66, on the *umma* theme.

¹⁰For a fuller discussion of this point, see below, 153–54.

¹¹For a fuller discussion of this idea, see Donner, “From Believers to Muslims.”

lenged the early Believers was the question of exactly how they could be sure that Muḥammad had, in fact, spoken and acted on divine authority. Many accounts belonging to this theme therefore contain an implicit, and sometimes an explicit, polemical quality, emphasizing the truth of Muḥammad's prophetic claim and the error of those Christians or Jews who resist that claim.¹²

For example, numerous accounts describe an episode in which the young Muḥammad accompanies some of his relatives in a trading caravan to Syria. A monk intercepts the party, questions them about Muḥammad, examines him for the "seal of prophecy," and declares him to be a prophet he has long awaited. He then warns the caravan to keep Muḥammad away from the Byzantines (or, depending on the account, the Jews), for they would kill him.¹³

Some accounts belonging to the theme of *nubūwa* seem to have as their purpose the drawing of a sharp line separating Muḥammad from the pagan environment in which he grew up. Such accounts are essentially at pains to show that Muḥammad was truly the Prophet who was sent to cleanse Mecca and Arabia of the evils of paganism, and that being chosen as God's prophet, he was protected from sully himself

¹²The Islamic theological doctrine of *tahrīf*, or distortion of God's earlier revelations by Jews and Christians, can be seen as a reaction against those groups' insistence that a true prophet had to be foretold by earlier prophets. The doctrine of *tahrīf* makes it possible for Muslims to claim that Muḥammad had been foretold in the Torah and Gospels, but that references to him had been effaced in the course of transmission of those texts by the *ahl al-kitāb*. The doctrine of *tahrīf* thus grows out of this polemical context, which seems already to have roots in the Qur'an. Cf. Sūrat al-A'rāf (7): 157; Sūrat al-Ṣaff (61): 6 (Muḥammad foretold in earlier scriptures); Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 75; Sūrat al-Mā'idā (5): 13, 41 (Jews, Christians guilty of *tahrīf*). A full discussion of *tahrīf* is beyond the scope of this work; for an orientation, see *EI* ¹, "Tahrīf" (F. Buhl).

¹³Anti-Byzantine version: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1125-26 (al-'Abbās ibn Muḥammad ← Abū Nūh ← Yūnus ibn Abī Ishāq ← Abū Bakr ibn Abī Hātim ← Abū Mūsā); anti-Jewish version: *ibid.*, I, 1123-25 (Ibn Ishāq ← 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Bakr). The latter is one of the several reports of Muḥammad's supposed encounter with the Christian monk Baḥīrā; see *EI* ², "Baḥīrā" (A. Abel), for an overview of the polemics involved. See also accounts such as the one in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 4-6 (al-Zuhri ← 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Utba ← Ibn 'Abbās), and al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 344-47 (no. 9724), in which the Byzantine emperor Heraclius questions the Qurashī leader Abū Sufyān about the Prophet.

with pagan practices or impious behavior, even before he was aware of his status as prophet. As an example, we might cite an account which portrays the young Muḥammad, before receiving his call to prophecy, while on his way (at the instigation of a friend) to spend the night carousing in Mecca as young men were wont to do, being lulled to sleep by music he overhears,¹⁴ thus unwittingly being spared from such impiety.

Still other accounts belonging to the *nubūwa* theme attempt to demonstrate Muḥammad's prophetic status by attributing to him miraculous powers. In one example, the Prophet summons a cluster of dates from the tree for a man who wants to see some sign (*āya*) of Muḥammad's prophetic power. The dates hopped across the ground until they were in front of Muḥammad, then, on his command, returned to their place in the tree.¹⁵ These kinds of accounts in particular are developed into an extensive literature on *dalā'il al-nubūwa*, "the signs of prophecy." As al-Ṭabarī says: "The stories of the proof of his prophethood are too numerous to be counted. We shall devote a book to this subject, if God wills."¹⁶

However, establishing Muḥammad's prophetic status also involved, at times, fairly straightforward descriptions of the circumstances surrounding the revelatory events.¹⁷ A typical example is 'Ā'isha's description of Muḥammad when he received the revelations clearing her of charges of infidelity in the "affair of the lie" (*ḥadīth al-ifk*):

¹⁴Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, I, 1126–27 (Ibn Ishāq ← Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Qays ibn Makrama ← al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ← his father ← his grandfather 'Alī). The tradition was not always completely successful in this; see the episode analyzed in Kister, "A Bag of Meat," where, despite heavy efforts at redaction, one can still discern the fact that Muḥammad, before his call, made sacrifice to pagan idols.

¹⁵Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, I, 1146 (Aḥmad ibn Sinān al-Wāsiṭī ← Abū Mu'āwiya ← al-A'mash ← Abū Zabyān ← Ibn 'Abbās). A large collection of such accounts is found in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.2, 112–29; a few more in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 671–72. On such stories see Horovitz, "Zur Muḥammadlegende."

¹⁶Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, I, 1146; trans. Watt and McDonald, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, VI: *Muhammad at Mecca*, 67. Despite al-Ṭabarī's comment, God apparently did not so will, for no book on *dalā'il al-nubūwa* is known among al-Ṭabarī's works. A valuable study of accounts of this kind is found in Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*. See also his article, "Die Legenden von der Berufung Muhammads."

¹⁷Several are found in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.2, 131–32.

And, by God, the Apostle had not moved from where he was sitting when there came over him from God what used to come over him and he was wrapped in his garment and a leather cushion was put under his head. . . Then the Apostle recovered and sat up and there fell from him as it were drops of water on a winter day, and he began to wipe the sweat from his brow. . . .¹⁸

The desire to establish a context for various Qur'ānic verses gave rise to another whole literary genre, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* or "occasions of revelation," which attempted to fix exactly when in the Prophet's life each verse in the Qur'ān was revealed.¹⁹ An example is the report placing the revelation of *Sūrat al-Faṭḥ* (48) during the Prophet's return from the expedition to al-Ḥudaybiya;²⁰ another describes the situation in which was revealed the verse banning *ṭalāq al-ẓihār*, a rude formula for requesting divorce that had been practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia.²¹

Muḥammad's prophetic status is also affirmed by recounting instances in which he initiated crucial ritual requirements of Islam, or in

¹⁸Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 735–36; trans. Guillaume, *Life of Muḥammad*, 497. See the analysis of differing descriptions of Muḥammad's first revelations in Sellheim, "Muhammads erstes Offenbarungserlebnis."

¹⁹Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, *infra*, see index, and esp. 226–33, is the most recent and detailed examination of this phenomenon; he argues that the historical information was conveyed independent of the Qur'ānic verses being glossed. This contradicts a long tradition of Western scholarship that viewed the "historical" glosses as dependent upon the Qur'ānic passages. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 27, argued that *mab'ath* accounts often involve "historicization," i.e. the construction of a spurious "historical" context or episode to provide a setting for a particular Qur'ānic passage. Burton, "Towards a Fresh Perspective on the Islamic Sunna," argued that the Qur'ān text itself was the inspiration for a first generation of "atomistic" exegetical *ḥadīths*, conjured up to elucidate specific Qur'ānic words and phrases, and that later, the exegetical origins of these *ḥadīths* having been forgotten, they were synthesized by later exegetes as raw material in the elaboration of "historical" *tafsīr*. See also Rippin, "Ibn 'Abbās's *Al-Lughāt fī l-Qur'ān*," *idem*, "Ibn 'Abbās's *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*," *idem*, "Al-Zuhri, *Naskh al-Qur'ān* and the Problem of Early *Tafsīr* Texts."

²⁰Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 749 (← al-Zuhri).

²¹"God has heard the saying of the woman who petitioned you about her husband and complained to God. . . ." *Sūrat al-Mujādila* (58): 1, quoted in 'Umar ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, 392–94.

which he served as the leader of expeditions launched by the new community, received delegations of tribesmen tendering their submission to it, or settled disagreements and kept the peace among his sometimes contentious followers. All of these roles conformed to the generally accepted image of how a prophet was supposed to behave, and reports of this kind can thus be considered representatives of the *nubūwa* theme; but they also have important implications for the notion of community, and for this reason will be treated in the next chapter under the *umma* theme.

Despite their variety, the different types of accounts within the *nubūwa* theme all have as their common goal the affirmation of Muḥammad's status as prophet and apostle of God. Because the Believers' pagan opponents were eliminated relatively quickly, the need to differentiate Muḥammad from his pagan surroundings and Muslims from pagans quickly faded in importance. On the other hand, the early Believers' contacts with Christian and Jewish communities, which had begun already in Arabia, were greatly intensified during and after the first wave of conquests, as the Believers established themselves in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. The fact that relatively few of these *nubūwa* accounts strive to put distance between Muḥammad and his pagan environment, whereas a much larger number address the distinction between Muslims and either Christians or Jews, suggests that the theme emerged mainly once Muslims had become engaged in theological debates with the other prophetic religions;²² and the main way to make this distinction was to establish beyond doubt Muḥammad's status as prophet. As one scholar has observed: "...one of the major functions of the *Sīrah* is to present a biography of Muḥammad that would fit into the already existent and revered patterns of Christian hagiology."²³ It seems most likely that this would have taken place only after the Believers found themselves ruling large Christian and Jewish communities with sophisticated traditions of theology and communal history—as they did in

²²See Stroumsa, "Signs of Prophecy."

²³Newby, "Coptic Literary Influence," 280. Cf. *idem*, *Making of the Last Prophet*, 22: "...the whole of the *Sīrah* appears to be an apology for Islamic religious superiority over Judaism and Christianity...Muḥammad and the Arabs are depicted as the heirs to the Abrahamic heritage." See also Fahd, "Problèmes de typologie dans la 'Sīra' d'Ibn Ishāq."

the early years of the Umayyad period (661–750). To the extent that particular *nubūwa* accounts relied on the actual memories of individuals to provide basic information, we might say that the theme relies on material of Medinese (or Hījāzī) origin, but the incentive for collecting or creating accounts on this theme seems more likely to have originated outside Arabia, in the heavily Christian and Jewish territories of the fertile crescent—particularly Syria, where the Umayyads ruled, and al-Kūfa, site of what was probably the largest community of Believers outside Arabia during the first half-century AH. The possible role of the Umayyads in this process should not be overlooked; it is noteworthy that the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, built at ‘Abd al-Malik’s request, place major emphasis on Muḥammad’s status as prophet and on undermining the Christian idea of the Trinity.²⁴

Qur’ān-Related Narratives

One of the first kinds of narrative material in which Believers appear to have become interested was that which related more fully the stories of figures mentioned in the Qur’ān. Such accounts must properly be considered a branch of *tafsīr* or Qur’ānic exegesis, not history, but because they usually took the form of narratives they were commonly included in later compilations of historical accounts.²⁵ At the same time, we may surmise that the active circulation of such stories about Qur’ānic figures, especially the pre-Islamic prophets and their communities, may have encouraged the early Believers to begin thinking about compiling also their recollections of their own Prophet and community and casting them in the form of narratives. That is, such accounts about Qur’ānic figures may have made the early Believers for the first time “historically curious” about the life of Muḥammad, or at the very least may have provided models for the elaboration of narratives of Muḥammad’s life according to the themes of *nubūwa* and *umma*,²⁶ after their need to do so had been raised by other factors. Much of this material suggests

²⁴Busse, “Monotheismus und islamische Christologie;” Blair, “What is the Date of the Dome of the Rock?” But van Ess, “‘Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock,” suggests that association of the Dome with Muḥammad’s *mi‘rāj* or ascension may only have occurred later, after the time of the caliph al-Walīd (r. 86–96/705–15).

²⁵See Watt, “The Materials used by Ibn Ishāq,” esp. 25.

²⁶On the *umma* theme, see below, 160–66.

that we can best view this theme as one of PREPARATION, in that the accounts often serve implicitly or explicitly to remind hearers that Muḥammad's prophetic mission had been foreshadowed, and in some measure facilitated by the activities of earlier prophets.

Of special concern to the early Believers were the pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān. The prophets of the Judaic tradition who are mentioned in the Qur'ān—Adam, Abraham, Moses, and many others—were of course well known to the Jewish (and Christian) communities in Arabia itself as well as in the other Near Eastern lands, and the early Believers were able to garner much fuller accounts of these prophets' lives from the stories carried on in these communities.²⁷ Similarly, the story of certain key episodes that occurred in both the Qur'ān and in the Old Testament, such as Creation, the fall of Satan, Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, and indeed the whole story of the children of Israel (Banī Isrā'īl) was circulated widely and found its way into the later compilations of Muslim historians.²⁸ Some of the pre-Islamic prophets, such as Abraham and Moses, were accorded special attention as precursors of Muḥammad in establishing monotheism and in leading their communities.²⁹

An example of a somewhat different kind of figure who came to be of interest in "historical" narratives was the pre-Islamic sage Luqmān.³⁰ The Qur'ān (Sūra 31) presents him as the epitome of believing monotheist wisdom, and as such he became the ideal grafting place for much

²⁷For the popular literature of the Jewish communities, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, "Aggadah" for an overview, and Ginzberg's classic *Legends of the Jews* for specifics.

²⁸On the incorporation of haggadic material into the nascent Islamic tradition, see *EI* ², "Isrā'īliyyāt" (G. Vajda); also Rosenthal, "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim History;" Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja;" *idem*, "Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature;" Heller, "La légende biblique dans l'Islam;" *idem*, "The Relation of the Aggada to Islamic Legends;" Hirschberg, *Jüdische und christliche Lehren*; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 171–81; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 68–73. Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 36–37, 44–56, notes important Christian sources of such information, as well as Jewish ones.

²⁹For a brief introduction, see *EI* ², "Ibrāhīm" (R. Paret), and "Mūsā" (B. Heller), with literature and summary of controversies.

³⁰For orientation, see *EI* ², "Luqmān" (B. Heller–N.A. Stillman), and references cited there.

material drawn from the pre-Islamic tradition of "wisdom literature," including both its Near Eastern component (e.g. the *Wisdom of Ahiqar*) and its Hellenistic component (e.g. Aesop). This material probably found its way into such early compilations as the (now lost) *Ḥikmat Luqmān* of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114).³¹

As we have seen, concern with this theme began very early in the history of the community of Believers. To judge from the evidence of book titles and comments on lost works by later authors, the first compilations on this theme were already being produced in the first half of the first century AH, that is, just as the Qur'ān itself was, according to Islamic tradition, assuming canonical form in the 30s AH. Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. ca. 34/654), a Jew from Yemen who joined the Believers, is said to have composed a book on Adam and Eve, an account of the mysterious Qur'ānic figure Dhū l-Kifl, and a book on the death of Moses.³² Another early author of Jewish origin, 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām (d. ca. 43/663), conveyed answers supposedly given by the prophets to various questions.³³ Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 110/728) is said to have compiled a collection of *isrā'īlīyāt*.³⁴ Material of this kind was included in some of the earliest biographies of the Prophet, such as that of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) of the Makhzūm clan of Quraysh.³⁵ Not all early biographies of the Prophet included this material, but when it was included it was part of the process of describing the pre-Islamic events that prepared the way for the mission of Muḥammad.

The circulation and collection of such *isrā'īlīyāt* (as they are known to Islamic tradition) and similar Qur'ān-related narratives was not merely an activity of the earliest years of the community of Believers, however, but rather one that continued to be pursued by Muslims for many centuries. This fact makes it difficult to be sure exactly how

³¹On this work, see Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih*, I, 207.

³²*GAS*, I, 304–305.

³³*Ibid.*, I, 304. On traditions about him, see Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 175–78.

³⁴Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 36; *GAS*, I, 305–307, attributes to him, among other things, a *Kitāb zabūr Dāwūd* and a *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. However, according to Kister, "Sīrah Literature," 354, the first discrete book devoted to *isrā'īlīyāt* was compiled by Ḥammād ibn Salama (d. 167/783).

³⁵*GAS*, I, 276.

much of the material now extant entered the Islamic tradition in the first century AH, since the early material is accompanied by (and in some cases doubtless replaced by) similar material collected by Muslim savants at a later date. The rapidly accumulating material on this theme, especially from Rabbinic sources, eventually emerged in separate works on the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("stories of the prophets"), or were included in large doses in universal histories and lives of the Prophet Muḥammad.³⁶

As noted above, the initial motive for the collection of such narrative material by Believers was probably the desire or need to clarify and fill out stories alluded to in the Qur'ān. The "referential" character of the Qur'ānic narratives, which clearly assumes that the initial hearers of the Qur'ān were already familiar with them, suggests that these stories were in some form already in circulation in Arabia before the Qur'ān's appearance. That they circulated in the large Christian and Jewish communities found in the Fertile Crescent lands conquered by the early Believers goes without saying. In some cases, they may have been known in full only to those familiar with the written religious literature of the Jewish or Christian communities, but in many instances they probably circulated in simplified form as popular stories. The collection of accounts of this kind by Believers was, then, not really a new departure in the cultural or religious life of the Near East, but merely a continuation of an older tradition of collecting such stories. The amassing of narrative material (*haggada*) among Jews from the fourth century CE onward may be seen as another dimension of the same tradition, and it is not entirely inappropriate to view the early Islamic collections as the Islamic equivalent of *midrashīm*—but ultimately connected with the elucidation of the Qur'ān, rather than of the Torah. Consequently, in the Islamic community only those stories with an Islamic, i.e. Qur'ānic, basis were gathered. It is partly for this

³⁶On *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* literature, see Nagel, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*; for a brief orientation, *EI*², "Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'" (T. Nagel). Material of this kind attributed to Ibn Ishāq, typical of the genre and culled from a variety of sources, is compiled and translated in Newby, *Making of the Last Prophet*. The contents of the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* of Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Kisā'ī (5th/11th century) can be reviewed in Thackston, trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā'ī*. See also Schützinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der arabischen Abraham-Nimrod-Legende*.

reason, no doubt, that in the universal histories of the third and fourth centuries AH there is to be found so much more material on Old Testament figures than on New Testament ones, for the Qur'ān itself refers much more frequently to episodes and figures known from the Old Testament than to Jesus or to episodes of distinctively Christian origin, such as the *aṣḥāb al-kahf* ("Seven Sleepers;" cf. Sūrat al-Kahf [18]: 9–22), or the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* ("Martyrs of Najrān;" cf. Sūrat al-Burūj [85]: 4–9).³⁷ By the same token, the Islamic historiographical tradition absorbed fuller stories about such figures as Luqmān, Ṣāliḥ, and others who, while Qur'ānic, do not form part of the Biblical tradition.³⁸

Only an exhaustive scrutiny of the extant Qur'ān-related narratives, which would form the basis for a massive study in its own right, would permit us to say whether or not the activity of collecting them in the early Islamic period was localized in certain places, and if so, where.³⁹ However, Iraq, particularly al-Kūfa,⁴⁰ suggests itself as a possible venue for such activity during the first Islamic century. Al-Kūfa was an active intellectual center at this time, one where other historiographical themes (e.g. *fitna*) were of great interest, as we shall see. It was also close to the large Jewish communities of central Babylonia, with their famed academies, which continued to operate (or, perhaps, came to operate once again) during the early Islamic period. These communities, in which the lamp of traditional Jewish learning still burned brightly, could have served as a ready source of information on the Old Testament prophets for the early Muslims. The Christian communi-

³⁷On the former, see *EI*², "Aṣḥāb al-kahf" (R. Paret), for an orientation; on the latter, *EI*², "Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd" (R. Paret), and Moberg, "The Book of the Himyarites."

³⁸Of these, the most thoroughly studied are the reports about "Alexander," usually identified by Muslim commentators (probably erroneously) with the Qur'ānic *dhū l-qarnayn*. See Pfister, *Alexander der Große*; Nagel, *Alexander der Große in der frühislamischen Volksliteratur*.

³⁹Useful preliminary work in Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, especially the Introduction and analysis of Documents 1 and 2. Abbott's analysis in the Introduction is hampered by the fact that she did not analyze specific themes separately.

⁴⁰Al-Basra probably contributed less, but some surviving accounts appear to be clearly of Baṣran origin, e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 791–92 (Bishr ibn Mu'ādh ← Yazīd ibn Zuray' ← Sa'īd ← Qatāda), on three messengers sent by Jesus to Antioch.

ties of central and lower Iraq in early Islamic times could also have contributed. Material belonging to this theme seems to have entered the Islamic tradition especially through the efforts of the Iraqi scholars Sa'īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714), al-Suddī (d. 128/745), and Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 204/819).

A second likely locus of cultivation of this material appears to have been Yemen, whose materials were conveyed especially by Wahb ibn Munabbih and Ka'b al-Aḥbār.⁴¹ Surprisingly little direct evidence points to Syria or Egypt as sources of information bearing on Qur'ān-related narratives, despite the sizeable Jewish and Christian communities there. However, Abbott has pointed out apparent Syriac (though not necessarily Syrian) antecedents to the Arabic Adam and Eve story,⁴² and al-Zuhri's reports to Ibn Ishāq may disguise some material of Syrian origin. Why Syria and Egypt should not have conveyed a wealth of material on such "Biblical" themes is not clear; the once-famous Jewish academies in Tiberias (Palestine) had by this time been inactive for centuries, and the Jews of the Ḥijāz, at least, may have been removed to Iraq or elsewhere with the Islamic conquest, which may explain the dearth of Syrian Jewish material. For Christian materials the evidence is less full, but a surprising amount of material about Qur'ānic "Christian figures" appears to come from al-Baṣra or as already noted, via the Yemenite Wahb ibn Munabbih.⁴³

We must note once again, however, that these comments on the possible localization of early concern with the theme of Qur'ān-related narratives are largely speculative, and definitive conclusions must await detailed analysis of the transmission and development of the narratives themselves.

⁴¹On Wahb and Ka'b as conduits for Christian material, see Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, 20–26; Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 44–56. On Ka'b as conduit for archaic, non-rabbinic Jewish material, see Halperin and Newby, "Two Castrated Bulls."

⁴²Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 44–56.

⁴³For Baṣran material, see 158 n. 40 above; for Wahb, see, for example, the long account on the birth of Jesus in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 724–32.

CHAPTER 6

THEMES OF COMMUNITY

SINCE THE UNDERLYING PURPOSE of the narratives of Islamic origins was to articulate the validity of Muslims' communal identity, it was important to show not only that Muḥammad had been truly a prophet (the function of the *nubūwa* theme), but also to describe how he had succeeded in establishing the new community, and to demonstrate the continuing persistence of that community from its beginnings. These concerns took the form of three historiographical themes we shall designate *umma*, *cult and administration*, and *taxation*. (Inasmuch as the stories of pre-Islamic prophets are almost inseparable from the stories of their communities, moreover, the theme of Qur'ān-related narratives discussed in the previous chapter might almost equally well be placed in this chapter, among the themes of community, where it would serve as a theme of PREPARATION.)

Umma

The theme we call *umma* (Arabic for "community") describes how Muḥammad founded the original community of Believers in Medina. It thus includes all accounts that trace Muḥammad's interactions with supporters and opponents during his lifetime—what we might call the "political history" or "secular history" of his life. It is a theme of INCEPTION.

Accounts belonging to the two themes of *nubūwa* and *umma*, considered together, generally make up the bulk of literary compilations bearing the title *sīra* ("course of life") or *maghāzī* ("raids"). Although

umma accounts usually describe events in the Prophet's life in a way that takes his apostolic mission for granted, the themes of *umma* and *nubūwa* are, as noted above, closely interrelated.¹ It is, therefore, often futile to try to assign a given account exclusively to one theme or the other; we must, rather, see it as embodying both. For example, the concept of prophecy appears to have included the notions that a prophet would gain a following (perhaps from the poor and humble at first), that he would encounter some opposition from his own kinsmen, that he would undergo various trials and persecutions, and that he would eventually establish a righteous community of believers under his leadership.² Any account that confirms Muḥammad's position as founder and leader of the new community or *umma* can, then, also be read as a confirmation of his status as prophet, his *nubūwa*, at least by implication. Sometimes, as in the following example, the association is explicit: "The Prophet said: 'Every prophet has a sacred enclave (*ḥaram*), so I have made Medina [my] sacred enclave as Abraham had made Mecca [his]. Between its two *ḥarras* no one shall cut its green things, prune its trees, or carry weapons for fighting....'"³ The account not only describes Muḥammad's establishment of a *ḥaram* or "sacred enclave" in Medina⁴—an event that can be considered one of the key moments in the inception of the Islamic community; it also explicitly links this act to prophetic status, and associates Muḥammad with Abraham.

Some *umma* accounts, while describing the origins of the new community of Believers established by Muḥammad, stress the distance between the new community and the older communal groups to which its members had belonged. The following example describes events surrounding the so-called "second pledge of al-'Aqaba," during which

¹See above, 149 n. 9. On the changing usage of the term *maghāzī* in particular, see Hinds, "'Maghāzī' and 'Sīra' in Early Islamic Scholarship."

²Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 4–6, on Abū Sufyān and Heraclius (noted above, 150 n. 13) exhibits many of these characteristics.

³Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 7–8 (Shaybān ibn Abī Shayba al-Ubullī ← Abū l-Ash'ath ← al-Ḥasan). On such accounts, which draw explicitly on traditions about "Biblical" cult sites to advance Islamic cultic claims, see Busse, "Der Islam und die biblischen Kultstätten."

⁴On the functioning of the *ḥaram* see Serjeant, "Ḥaram and Ḥawṭah."

some tribesmen from Yathrib (Medina) agreed to follow Muḥammad (an event that paved the way for Muḥammad's emigration to Yathrib and the foundation of the independent community of Believers there):

‘Āsim ibn ‘Umar ibn Qatāda told me that when the people came together to plight their faith to the Apostle, al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Ubāda ibn Naḍla al-Anṣārī, of the clan of Banū Sālim ibn ‘Awf, said: “O men of Khazraj, do you realize to what you are committing yourselves in pledging your support to this man? It is to war against all and sundry.⁵ If you think that if you lose your property and your nobles are killed you will give him up, then do so now, for it would bring shame in this world and the next [if you did so later]; but if you think that you will be loyal to your undertaking if you lose your property and your nobles are killed, then take him, for by God it will profit you in this world and the next.” They said: “We accept him, despite loss of property and killing of our nobles. But what will we get in return for our loyalty, O Apostle of God?” He replied: “Paradise.” So they said: “Stretch forth your hand,” and when he did so they pledged their word.⁶

The account clearly emphasizes the way in which the new *umma* or community was to sever old ties, even those of loyalty to one's own tribe and wealth.

Another class of accounts belonging to the *umma* theme depict Muḥammad's original community in Medina as already having a self-conscious confessional identity distinct from other monotheist communities, particularly Jews and Christians. A typical representative is the following report, placed in the context of the raid by Muḥammad on Wādī l-Qurā. The Prophet provides a brief catechism of basic beliefs, after which one of his followers asks: “Who are these?” The Prophet says: “Those with whom God is angry” (*al-maghḍūbi ‘alayhim*, a phrase used in the opening chapter of the Qur’ān), meaning the Jews. Then

⁵Lit., “the red and the black among mankind.”

⁶Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 299; the translation is that of Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 204–205, slightly modified.

his follower asks: "And who are those?," to which the Prophet replies: "Those going astray" (*al-ḍāllīn*, from the same chapter), meaning the Christians (*al-naṣāra*). This is followed by a discussion of rules for the proper division of booty taken in a raid.⁷ The account thus shows the Prophet establishing some basic rules for the new community of Believers, and also explicitly draws boundaries between this community and both Christians and Jews through pointed reference to the best-known of all Qur'ānic chapters.

One of the largest groups of reports we can classify within the *umma* theme deals with events such as the Prophet's campaigns against various rival groups, etc., as found in works like al-Wāqidi's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, etc. Accounts of this kind are so numerous that providing a specific example here seems superfluous. Reports on these matters underline the unity and cohesion of the original community in Medina by presenting it as engaged in collective action; moreover, the sum of such accounts provides a history of the first coalescence and early history of the community. It is for these reasons that we categorize such accounts as part of the *umma* theme, even though Muḥammad's leadership role might incline us to view many of them also under the rubric *nubūwa*, as effective leadership of the community was doubtless understood by all to be one of the hallmarks of prophecy. Accounts relating Muḥammad's dispatch of letters calling various leaders and groups to Islam, and reporting on the reception by Muḥammad of delegations from various tribes who came to tender their submission to Muḥammad and the new community can be viewed in much the same light; in this case, the reports not only chronicle the culmination of the Medina community's coalescence, but foreshadow its eventual expansion to include all of Arabia following the Prophet's death in 11/632.⁸

⁷Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, I, 352–53 (part of no. 738, 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Ghiyāth ← Ḥammād ibn Salama ← Budayl ibn Maysara ← 'Abd Allāh ibn Shaqīq ← a man of Bal-Qayn).

⁸On the dispatch of letters, see Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.2, 15–38. The main collections of accounts on the delegations are found in Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.2, 38–86; 'Umar ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madīna al-Munawwara*, 499–602. See also Wellhausen, "Seine Schreiben, und die Gesandtschaften an ihn," which includes an edition of the relevant parts of Ibn Sa'd's text.

Still other reports seem to recognize that differences may exist within the community, but imply that they should be submerged in the interest of the greater good. For example, several accounts describe the rivalry that arose between Muḥammad's followers from the Aws and Khazraj tribes, or tensions between the Anṣār and Muhājirūn, and his efforts to smooth over their differences. It is worth noting that some of these accounts show the rivalry being put to rest, or being exploited, in ways that emphasize the Muslims' distinctness from other communities. In one account, for example, the Aws and Khazraj try to outdo one another by each murdering a troublesome Jew,⁹ a description that certainly puts some distance between the Muslim and Jewish communities in the hearer's mind, and portrays that distance as being aboriginal, i.e. dating from the time of the Prophet himself.

Finally, we can include in the *umma* theme many accounts that depict Muḥammad in his role as the decisive model for a whole host of social and ritual practices.¹⁰ Once the Islamic community had consciously embraced its own distinctive identity as a confessional group (around 70 AH and later), with the prophecy of Muḥammad serving as the focus and key characteristic of this new confessional identity, there developed a tendency to see Muḥammad as a paradigm for individual and communal behavior. Sometimes the Prophet's actions are rooted in specific historical moments, as for example accounts that describe the institution of prayers, Friday prayers, or fasting.¹¹ In other cases, the Prophet is depicted as paradigm in a manner that is not historically specific, as when he is said to have enjoined use of the *siwāk* or rinsing the mouth before Friday prayers;¹² the ahistorical quality of such accounts lends them that air of timeless validity typical of much of the *ḥadīth* literature.

Accounts of these kinds served as the basis for establishing the Prophet's *sunna*, which emerged in the first two centuries AH as the sec-

⁹Al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 407–10 (no. 9747) (al-Zuhrī ← 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ka'b ibn Mālik). See also Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 726–28, on 'Abd Allāh ibn Ubayy.

¹⁰As noted above, 152–53, these accounts could also be placed within the *nubūwa* theme.

¹¹E.g. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 356–48, on call to prayer, etc.

¹²Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 214.

ond main base for the elaboration of Islamic law, alongside the Qur'ān itself.¹³ Whether we choose to see a particular account of this kind as an authentic one based on the actual memories of early Believers who had witnessed the Prophet's actions, or as an *ex post facto* invention made specifically to legitimize a later practice by lending it Prophetic sanction, its purpose in either case is the same: to show Muḥammad in his role as the architect and leader of the original community of Muslims.¹⁴

What factors contributed to the rise of *umma* accounts, and when and where did they originate? Although some of the information conveyed about the Prophet in such accounts may indeed rest on authentic memories of his deeds, and so may go back to the Prophet's time, the theme itself, which provided the decisive incentive to collect such material, seems to have emerged only during the second half of the first century AH, when the need to affirm the distinctness of the Muslim community from other monotheist confessions, and the need to define social and ritual practice in terms of Prophetic precedent, began to be felt in earnest. For, as we have seen, the desire to stress the distinction between the Islamic community and other confessional communities (Jews, Christians, etc.) is a prominent feature of many reports belonging to the *umma* theme.¹⁵

Another factor that may have contributed to the growth of the *umma* theme was the desire of individuals or groups to record/establish their priority of conversion (*sābiqa*) and their close relations to the Prophet, their participation in certain key events in the Prophet's life (*hijra*, Badr, Uḥud, conquest of Mecca, etc.), or the fate of particular individuals, groups, and places. This may explain why lists are prominent in such accounts.¹⁶ Such motivations for collecting information

¹³The classic formulation of the argument that *sunna* only gradually acquired the meaning of "sunna of the Prophet" is in Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, 58–81. (I have not been able to secure a copy of Schacht's article "Sur l'expression 'Sunna du Prophète.'") See also Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition*, 30–38; *idem*, "Development of *Sunna* as a Technical Term."

¹⁴The question of the authenticity or historicity of individual accounts is discussed in Chapter 9 below.

¹⁵See the example above, 150.

¹⁶E.g. the lists of Muslims killed at Uḥud in Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 607–609. Explaining the list of polytheists killed (*ibid.*, 610–11) is not as easy.

about the Prophet's life most probably grew out of either tribal, clan, or family chauvinism, or out of the political and social quarrels that arose among Muslims after the First and Second Civil Wars.¹⁷

Although it seems that the *umma* theme first coalesced during the last third of the first century AH, it is not clear exactly where and under whose aegis *umma* accounts first emerged; they may have arisen throughout the community as an expression of a generally felt need to affirm the new community's distinct identity. It is, however, not unreasonable to assume that the leaders of the community of Believers—the Umayyad "commanders of the Believers" (sing. *amīr al-mu'minīn*)—may have played a prominent role in cultivating such accounts. We know, for example, that the caliph 'Abd al-Malik had contact with one of the first figures to specialize in narratives about the Prophet's life, 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/713). 'Urwa is said to have responded to the caliph's request for information about Abū Sufyān and other contemporaries of the Prophet by sending a letter containing the earliest account of the battle of Badr.¹⁸ Moreover, the general outlines of the *sīra* as enshrined in the works now available to us, such as those of Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī, are usually considered to be the work of 'Urwa's student al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), who appears to have been closely associated for many years with the Umayyad caliphs.¹⁹

Cult and Administration²⁰

The Muslim community existed, and exists, not only as the sociological organism descended from the community first established by the Prophet Muḥammad; it also had (and has) an identity defined in part by its adherence to particular social and ritual practices. These practices define the sociological boundaries of the Muslim community as it passes through time. The historiographical theme that we shall designate *cult and administration* includes accounts that describe the establishment and survival of such practices. It is primarily a BOUNDARY

¹⁷For a fuller discussion, see under the theme of *fitna* below, 184–90.

¹⁸Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1284–88.

¹⁹On al-Zuhri's relations with the Umayyads, see now the valuable study by Lecker, "Biographical Notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri."

²⁰On the administrative accounts see Noth/Conrad, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 35–36, 53–55.

theme, because its accounts affirm the continuance of various cultic features that help provide the Muslim community with its distinctive identity.²¹

Closely related to accounts about cult are accounts that describe key administrative practices of the early Islamic state. (Moreover, as we shall see, these two kinds of accounts—cultic and administrative—are frequently combined or juxtaposed by the chroniclers.) Because the state was presented as the guardian and political embodiment of the Islamic community, the continuation of both the caliphate itself and the administrative practices of the state were tantamount to an expression of the community's continued existence, even though many of these administrative practices were not in any sense distinctively "Islamic."²²

The compilations of the third century AH and later sometimes provide laconic notices on diverse administrative and cultic assignments of the early Islamic state: the appointment of governors, the dispatch and leadership of major military campaigns (including the *ṣawā'if* or summer campaigns against the Byzantines), leadership of the pilgrimage, etc. Such brief notices seem often to have been worked into the framework of many later compilations, especially those following an annalistic arrangement. A typical example is al-Ṭabarī's short entry noting the leader of the annual summer raid against the Byzantines (*ṣā'ifa*) for AH 52, and different opinions on who led the pilgrimage in that year.²³

The compilers appear to have received this material as lists of rulers, governors, pilgrimage leaders, etc., usually from second-century schol-

²¹Accounts detailing the inauguration of particular cultic practices by the Prophet Muḥammad may be considered to belong more appropriately to the INCEPTION themes of *nubūwa* or *umma*. See above, 152–53.

²²For example, the appointment of governors. On the theme of *khilāfa* or caliphate, which does have a specifically Islamic cast, see below, 182–83.

²³Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 157 (citing al-Wāqidī and "others" on *ṣā'ifa*; al-Wāqidī, Abū Ma'shar, and "others" on the pilgrimage). Examples for a later period: *ibid.*, II, 1232, on the pilgrimage for AH 91 (Abū Ma'shar); Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, XVI, 442:9–11 (... 'Alī ibn Muḥammad [al-Madā'inī] ← 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Mahnī (?) ← 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ibrāhīm), on Maslama ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Rīb'ī al-Juhanī's service as Hishām's treasurer and supervisor of the *tābūt al-zakāt* for Damascus.

ars who systematically worked out the relative and absolute chronologies of early Islamic history, such as al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742), Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767), Abū Ma'shar (d. 170/780), and al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823).²⁴ A long account of al-Zuhrī gives a condensed narrative of the sequence of raids and governors from late in the Prophet's lifetime to Mu'āwīya's victory at the end of the First Civil War;²⁵ it may be that accounts of this kind served as the basis for lists of administrators. A fragment of one of the lists from which the later compilers drew such information—unfortunately without any indication of its source—appears to survive in al-Ya'qūbī's *Ta'rikh*.²⁶ In some cases, annalists provide little more than such administrative information when other themes of interest to them are "dry" for the years being considered, suggesting that these lists may have formed the basic scaffolding around which they constructed their annals.²⁷ Not infrequently, differences of opinion emerge among the transmitters of administrative information, just as they differed on points of chronology,²⁸ and it seems likely that this administrative information was organized and tabulated as part of the chronological systematization.

Another kind of account describes the creation or evolution of certain administrative or cultic institutions of importance. For example, one report informs us that "in the days of 'Umar and 'Uthmān, the army used to gather at al-Jābiya to collect the stipend (*al-aṭā*) and to undertake missions, until Mu'āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān transferred them to the military encampment of Dābiq because of its proximity

²⁴Rotter, "Abū Zur'a," 91–92. On the development of these chronological schemes, see Chapter 10 below.

²⁵Al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 452–66.

²⁶Al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh* (Beirut), II, 239–40; it names the *ṣā'ifa* leaders for each year of Mu'āwīya's reign. See also Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, XVIII, 373:6–13, which lists governors of Iraq who had charge of both al-Kūfa and al-Baṣra (... al-Aṣma'ī ← Salama ibn Bilāl ← Mujālid); also Abū Zur'a, *Ta'rikh*, 198–209, compiles a list of judges of Damascus, Filastīn, and Marv (!). Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, I, 107–108, provides a list of Abū Bakr's *ummāl*.

²⁷For example, Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, has mainly information on governorships and on raids and their leaders for the years between the end of the First Civil War in AH 40 and the uprising of Ḥujr ibn 'Adī in AH 51.

²⁸E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2809, where al-Wāqidī and Abū Ma'shar differ on the leaders of the pilgrimage for AH 24.

to the frontier-posts (*al-thughūr*).²⁹ Another tells us that in the year 16, 'Umar wrote to the various conquered lands informing them of the appointed times of prayer.³⁰

The accounts about the founding of the *dīwān* or payroll for soldiers and some others, such as the Prophet's widows, form a rather special chapter among administrative accounts, both because of their importance in the historiographical tradition³¹ and because of the attention they have received from modern scholars.³² In a similar category we can place various accounts describing 'Abd al-Malik's minting of gold and silver coins, the beginnings of his so-called "coinage reform."³³ We may also wish to see in the same light the accounts describing the initial settlement and urban organization of various Muslim garrison towns, particularly al-Kūfa. These accounts are limited in number and their factual value as evidence is open to debate, but they have been intensively studied and used by modern scholarship.³⁴

To judge from surviving titles, the earliest compilations explicitly dedicated to questions of administration seem to have appeared in the late second century AH. They include a number of monographs

²⁹Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, I, 47, 590 (... al-Walīd ibn Muslim ← 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yazīd ibn Jābir and others). See also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, 119 (no. 343: Muṭarrif ← Mālik), which tells us that Mu'āwiya was the first to have guards and a prison.

³⁰Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, 105 (no. 297: no *isnād*); al-Barrādī, *Jawāhir al-muntaqāt*, 47.

³¹The creation of the *dīwāns* (*tadwīn al-dawāwīn*) by 'Umar is covered in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 2749–57. The majority of the reports come from al-Wāqidī, probably from his monograph on this subject (see next paragraph). Additional reports are found in Abū 'Ubayd, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, 318–24; al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rīkh* (Beirut), II, 153; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 449–61.

³²See, on the *dīwān*, esp. Puin, *Der Dīwān von 'Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb*, who after careful study clearly accepts the historicity of 'Umar's innovation of the *dīwān*.

³³Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, II, 939–40; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 465–70; Abū 'Ubayd, *Kitāb al-amwāl*, 700–702; al-Dīnawarī, *Al-Akhbār al-ṭiwāl*, 316, mentions it briefly. For some context on the coinage reform, see especially Bates, "History, Geography, and Numismatics," *idem*, "The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads."

³⁴Many of these accounts on settlement in Iraq and Syria are collected in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 226–36, 239–50. See especially al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 2488–90 (← Sayf) on the settlement of al-Kūfa, which has provided the slender basis of evidence on which rest whole books: al-Janābī, *Takhtūṭ madīnat al-Kūfa*; Djaīt, *Al-Kufa*. For accounts on the early settlement of Fustāt, see Kubiak, *Al-Fustat*.

by al-Haytham ibn 'Adī (d. 206/822), including ones on governors of al-Kūfa, judges of al-Kūfa and al-Baṣra, *amīrs* of Khurāsān and Yemen, officers and bodyguards of the governors of Iraq, the most noteworthy scribes or bureaucrats (*ashraf al-kuttāb*), the land allotments of al-Kūfa, and settlement of the Arabs in the Iraqi lowlands and in Khurāsān.³⁵ His contemporaries al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823) and Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/826) also actively pursued this theme, the former compiling works on the minting of gold and silver coins (from which the report noted above was doubtless drawn), on 'Umar's creation of the *dīwāns*, and on the claims of the Quraysh and Anṣār to land assignments (*qaṭā'i*).³⁶

This material on administration, often presented in very laconic form, may have developed in association with the elaboration of chronological schemes, which as we have seen appears to have included compiling lists of governors, etc.³⁷ This notion is bolstered by the fact that the first compilations on administration crystallized at about the same time as the elaboration of chronological schemes, around the end of the second century AH. It is not clear, however, from what sources this administrative information ultimately comes. Some of it may derive from now-lost archives, although to the best of my knowledge there is no explicit statement in the sources themselves that support such a contention. Whatever misgivings we may have about the reliability of this information must be tempered by the fact that the existence of even some fairly early administrative appointees of whom the sources speak is confirmed by truly documentary evidence.³⁸ Moreover, there are other indications that quite old administrative information—some of it harking back even to Byzantine or Sasanian administrative traditions—could successfully be preserved and handed on to later generations of scholars.³⁹

³⁵Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (Flügel), I, 99–100; trans. Dodge, 217–18.

³⁶Wāqidi: Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (Flügel), I, 98–99; trans. Dodge, 214–15. Abū 'Ubayda: *Fihrist* (Flügel), I, 53–54; trans. Dodge, 115–18.

³⁷On the elaboration of chronological schemes, see Chapter 10 below.

³⁸E.g. coins bearing the names of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir and Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān: see Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, 58–59, 77–78.

³⁹In his descriptions of parts of the Islamic world, the geographer Ibn Khurdādhbih (d. 300/911) gives distances between locations in the former Sasanian territories (e.g. Iraq, Iran) in *parangs*, the standard Sasanian measure, whereas

The theme of cult and administration also appears to have been closely linked with the history of the caliphs and the *khilāfa* theme. This is not surprising, as both appear to share a common motive: the desire to affirm the legitimacy of the caliphate and its institutions, both cultic and administrative. We would expect this material, like that of the caliphate (*khilāfa*) theme, to have been cultivated especially by the circle of people associated with the Umayyads themselves, as rulers, and by their 'Abbāsīd successors.

Taxation⁴⁰

Another historiographical theme of some importance formed around problems of taxation. Careful study by Werner Schmucker and Albrecht Noth has shown that many of the accounts in this theme, which might well be viewed as part of the theme of administration, have their roots in mid-to-late first century AH in disputes between Muslim proprietors and the Umayyad state over the ownership and tax status of conquered lands, particularly in Iraq and Egypt.⁴¹ The dispute took the form of accounts describing particular cities or districts as having been conquered by force (*'anwatan*) or by treaty (*ṣulḥan*), which was taken as decisive in determining the tax status of the land. By the middle of the second century AH the *ṣulḥ*-*'anwa* concept had been elaborated as a comprehensive theory (largely, perhaps, through the work of transmitters such as al-Zuhrī and al-Sha'bī, who had close ties to the Umayyads), and it is only then that taxation begins to emerge as an historiographical theme.⁴² It was subsequently taken up and developed further by the early 'Abbāsīds, who wished to create a uniform and "Islamically" based tax system for the whole empire, to replace

distances between places in former Byzantine territories (e.g. Syria, Egypt) are measured in the Byzantine unit, miles. This suggests that the author—although not an historian in this case—was transmitting information that harked back, eventually, to Byzantine and Sasanian administrative sources. Kaegi, "Heraklios and the Arabs," 113, notes that al-Azdī al-Baṣrī's *Ta'rikh futūḥ al-Shām* includes information that could only have come from "some genuine familiarity with details of the history of Heraklios' reign."

⁴⁰Cf. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 45–47; Noth/Conrad, *Early Arabic Historiographical Tradition*, 48–49.

⁴¹Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*, esp. 192; Noth, "'Ṣulḥ'-'Anwa'-Traditionen."

⁴²Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*, 192.

the bewildering array of divergent, and often contradictory, local taxation practices that the 'Abbāsids had inherited when they seized the empire from the Umayyads.⁴³ This effort at systematization was spearheaded by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's chief judge, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb (d. 182/798), author of the first systematic tax treatise in the Islamic tradition, his *Kitāb al-kharāj*.⁴⁴

Especially prominent in this theme are older accounts (usually *futūḥ* reports)⁴⁵ that have been redacted to serve new purposes relating to questions of taxation. Not infrequently we encounter reports of the conquest that appear to have been slightly "doctored" to enable them to serve as evidence for purposes of the later concerns for tax systematization; the telltale trace of such editing is often the inclusion of the word *ṣulḥan* or *'anwatan*, or a phrase using a version of this terminology, in the text.⁴⁶ In some such cases, we can suppose that a particular early report has been reworked not once, but twice: a report of martial valor in the conquests by a particular tribesman, for example, having once been redacted to make it serve as evidence for the *futūḥ* theme, is then reworked yet again for the taxation theme.

Also common are brief accounts of the conquest of a particular place, sometimes little more than the bald assertion that it was conquered by

⁴³Taxation practices of the conquest era and under the Umayyads have been intensively studied with divergent results, partly by relying on documentary evidence preserved in papyri (which are almost all of Egyptian origin). See especially Dennett, *Conversion and the Poll-Tax*; Schmucker, *Untersuchungen*; Simonsen, *Caliphal Taxation System*; Morimoto, *Fiscal Administration of Egypt*.

⁴⁴Of many editions of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* the best by far is that of Iḥsān 'Abbās. Abū Yūsuf was not able to secure information for all parts of the empire; his chapter on immovable booty and land tax (*fay' wa-kharāj*), for example, has eighteen pages on conditions in Iraq, four on Syria and the Jazīra, and nothing on Egypt, Iran, Yemen, or other areas. The fact that the caliph was the moving spirit behind this systematization effort is reflected at 135–36, no. 50, in which Abū Yūsuf, addressing the caliph, states: "In reply to your queries about the situation in Jazīra and Syria, I wrote to a *shaykh* of Jazīra. . . ." Dodge, in his translation of Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* (116), mentions a *Kitāb al-bāj* ("Book of tribute/tax") by Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210/825), but this is not mentioned in the entry on Abū 'Ubayda in the Flügel edition of Ibn al-Nadīm, 53, and presumably represents a dittography on Dodge's part of the preceding title in the entry, the *Kitāb al-dībāj*.

⁴⁵On the *futūḥ* theme, see Chapter 7 below.

⁴⁶E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2805–2806.

force or by treaty, always using the technical terms *ṣulḥan* or *‘anwatan*. A typical report of this type states, “Abū ‘Ubayda sent ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ, after he left [the battle of] al-Yarmūk, to Qinnasrīn. [‘Amr] made a treaty with (*ṣālaḥa*) the people of Aleppo, Manbij, and Antioch. The rest of the territory of Qinnasrīn was conquered by force (*‘anwatan*).”⁴⁷ Brief reports of this kind are purely products of the taxation theme, and in their present form cannot be earlier than the emergence of this theme in the second century AH. This is not to say, however, that the information they convey is spurious; a second-century transmitter interested in conveying information on the taxation theme may have based his statement on older *futūḥ* accounts which he summarized and rephrased, or on which he based his own brief *ṣulḥ*-*‘anwa* report in some other way, selecting from it only the specific information of interest to him.⁴⁸

Many accounts dealing with taxation are found not in “historical” works, but in administrative and geographical compilations, such as Abū Yūsuf’s *Kitāb al-kharāj*, the *Kitāb al-amwāl* of Abū ‘Ubayd (d. 224/838), and the *Kitāb al-wuzarā’ wa-l-kuttāb* of al-Jahshiyārī (d. 331/942). Some works are hybrids of historical and administrative information. The *Futūḥ al-buldān* of al-Balādhuri (d. 279/892), for example, describes the conquests of various lands by the Muslims, but it focuses on those aspects of the conquests that had important administrative (especially tax) implications. It is organized by province and town and seldom fails to provide a description of whether a particular locality was taken by the Muslims by treaty or by force, thus providing a convenient handbook from which an administrator could ascertain the appropriate principles for taxation in any place.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, I, 124 (‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mughīra ← his father).

⁴⁸The summarization of longer accounts in order to eliminate material not deemed of interest to a later transmitter is discussed below, 263–66, under the rubric of “compression” (along with its opposite, “expansion”).

⁴⁹I recall first hearing the observation that al-Balādhuri’s *Futūḥ al-buldān* was an administrative manual in a conversation many years ago with Dr. Michael Bates of the American Numismatic Society.

CHAPTER 7

THEMES OF HEGEMONY

ANOTHER KEY ISSUE that is embedded in the Islamic origins narratives is the question of Muslim hegemony over non-Muslims. Immediately following the Prophet's death in 11/632, the early Believers had embarked on an extended series of conquests that resulted in the subjection of all the lands of the former Sasanian empire, and half of those of the Byzantine empire, and gave rise to the creation of an empire ruled by Arabian Believers that came to be self-consciously identified with Islam. The question of the legitimacy of Muslim hegemony over non-Muslims was an especially acute one because for many centuries a relatively small Muslim community ruled far larger numbers of non-Muslims. Legitimation of Muslim hegemony was therefore of utmost importance. In the narratives of Islamic origins, this issue takes the form primarily of two themes, which we shall designate *futūḥ* ("conquests") and *khilāfa* ("caliphate").

Futūḥ¹

The theme of *futūḥ*, or the wars of conquest waged by the early Muslims, is much in evidence in later compilations. It is a theme of INCEPTION, in that it aims to explain (and, in doing so, to justify) the way in which Muslim hegemony over non-Muslims in the Islamic state arose, and to chronicle when particular regions and cities were first brought into the bosom of the expanding Islamic state.

¹This theme is treated in Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 32–34; Noth/Conrad, 31–33.

The earliest surviving book on this theme is the *Ta'rikh futūḥ al-Shām* of al-Azdī al-Baṣrī (d. ca. 200/810),² but quotes of earlier works—the *Futūḥ al-'Irāq* and *Fūtūḥ al-Shām* of Abū Mikhnaḥ (d. 157/774),³ the *Futūḥ* of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767 or 151), and the *Futūḥ* of al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) appear to survive in al-Ṭabarī's history. Quotes from the lost *Futūḥ Miṣr* of Abū Qabīl al-Ma'āfirī (d. 128/745) are found in the work with similar title by Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871). The supposed *futūḥ* work of Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) may never have existed as a book, but he does seem to have collected material on this theme.⁴ The first books of *futūḥ* thus appear to be products of the very end of the first and early second century AH.

Noth has argued that the development of the general theme of *futūḥ* in Arabic-Islamic historiography is itself already a secondary phenomenon, one that stitches together originally separate thematic clusters of accounts dealing with the conquest of particular localities and events. He thus postulates the following evolution of written works on the *futūḥ* theme: first, there appeared collections of accounts about particular cities and battles; next, these were combined to form provincial collections; finally, the provincial collections were combined to form broad collections on the general theme of *futūḥ*.

As logical as Noth's reconstruction seems, however, there are reasons to think that it underestimates the importance of the overall theme of *futūḥ* at an early date in the evolution of Islamic historiography.⁵ First, while there can be no doubt that Muslim authors compiled many works on the conquest of specific regions—Noth provides a long, but by no means exhaustive, list of such works⁶—the earliest works on the

²On this author and work, see the important article by Conrad, "Al-Azdī's History." *GAS*, I, 293, lists it as *Mukhtaṣar futūḥ al-Shām*.

³On him see *GAS*, I, 308–309; Ursula Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*.

⁴*GAS*, I, 276, notes that al-Ṭabarī's history contains accounts on his authority concerning the life of the Prophet and the conquests, but no works on the conquest by him are listed in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm.

⁵Noth presents his reconstruction on the basis of logical cogency, but without specific documentation to support it: "Within the history of traditions, those collections of material which adhere to narrowly defined subject areas *ought* to be older than the compilations of traditions on the general theme of *futūḥ*" (Noth/Conrad, 32, emphasis added).

⁶Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 32–33; Noth/Conrad, 31–32.

theme of *futūḥ* of which we have record include a number whose titles or surviving quotes indicate that they were not restricted to a particular province, but rather considered the phenomenon of the conquests in a comprehensive manner. At the same time, while a few of the earliest compilations are focused on particular localities (notably the *Kitāb futūḥ Miṣr* of Abū Qabīl, d. 128/734),⁷ most of the "local" *futūḥ* books are relatively late—third century AH or later—and hence can hardly be used to support the idea that *futūḥ* historiography began with local collections. Even two of the earliest local *futūḥ* works—the monographs on the conquests of Syria and Iraq by Abū Mikhnaḥ (d. 157/774)—suggest, because the same author wrote both works and did not limit himself to the conquest of one region, that the broader *futūḥ* theme was uppermost in his mind; for in such a case there is little difference between a single book on the conquests generally, containing chapters on different regions, and separate monographs treating those regions individually.

Since the earliest *futūḥ* books are no longer extant, the objection can of course be raised that there once existed early (late first century, early second century) monographs or collections of traditions on the conquest of specific localities, no mention of which has survived, but which provided the information on which the early comprehensive *futūḥ* books were based. This argument, even though made from silence, must be taken seriously, for we usually assume that before the material crystallized in its first written form there was an earlier stage during which it circulated orally. Yet even if this were true, it ignores the fact that the collection of local *futūḥ* accounts simultaneously in so many widely separated parts of the early Islamic community can hardly be viewed as fortuitous coincidence. Rather, it may be seen more reasonably as separate local responses to a common impulse—the Islamic community's need to develop an historical vision of how the conquered lands (individually, as part of a whole) came under Muslim control. We do not, after all, find early collections of local traditions on many other things that we might deem equally interesting—for example, on the folklore of the conquered provinces, on the social or religious or economic activities of the conquered population, or even on the social or

⁷On him, see *GAS*, I, 341.

economic activities of the Muslims themselves in the conquered lands they settled. Even the subject of the Muslims' administration and settlement is rather sparsely represented. A few stray accounts on such subjects exist, but they are dwarfed in bulk by the massive numbers of *futūḥ* accounts, and none of them can be said to have constituted a central theme in early Islamic historiography.

Futūḥ did emerge as a key historiographical theme, however, and we must therefore ask why it became so important. Three main factors come to mind, each of which can be discerned in particular accounts.

1) The story of the conquests provided, first and foremost, a narrative justification of the rule by Muslims and Arabs of non-Muslims and non-Arabs.⁸ (During the first century AH, the distinction between "Muslim" and "Arab" appears to have been muddled by the fact that most of the early Muslims were also Arabians, and the rise of a clear Arab identity was—and has remained—intimately linked to the rise of Islam, a development we cannot explore here.⁹) In many accounts, the claim that Arab or Muslim rule in a given area is the result of God's will is signalled by the use of telltale phrases such as "God opened the city to the Muslims," "God destroyed the Byzantines," "God delivered the Muslims," etc.¹⁰ In other passages, God's favor for the conquerors is expressed more explicitly in the narrative, as in the report in which the Persian commander at al-Qādisīya, Rustam, interrogates an Arab captive:¹¹

Rustam said to him: "What has brought you (pl.) here? What do you want?" [The captive] replied: "We came to demand what God promised us (*maw'ūd Allāh*)." [Rustam] asked: "And what is that?" He said: "Your land, your sons,

⁸See Conrad, "Al-Azdī's History," 39–40: the point of the work is to show the conquests as "an expression of the divine will and plan of God at work." Some accounts speak in terms of "Arabs" vs. "Persians"/"Byzantines," others in terms of "Muslims"/"Believers" vs. "*mushrikūn*."

⁹An interesting treatment of some aspects of this question is found in Ende, *Arabische Nation und islamische Geschichte*.

¹⁰E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2145–47 (Ibn Ishāq).

¹¹*Ibid.*, I, 2254–55 (al-Sarī ← Shu'ayb ← Sayf ← al-Naḍr ibn al-Sarī ← Ibn al-Rufayl ← his father).

and your blood, if you refuse to submit.”¹² Rustam said: “And if you are killed before that?” He replied: “Among God’s promises is that whoever of us is killed before that, He shall make him enter paradise; and for whomever of us is left, He will fulfil what I told you. We are unwavering in our certainty.”

This account, then, is one of many that emphasizes the divinely supported nature of the conquests and, by implication, of the subsequent rule of non-believers by Believers. In some such accounts, various signs of God’s favor for the conquerors disclose the divine plan to the attentive reader. In one, for example, Rustam has a dream in which an angel hands the Persian weapons over to the caliph ‘Umar;¹³ in another, the Persian king Yazdagird, intending an insult, gives the Muslim emissaries a clod of earth, obviously symbolizing the coming change of rule.¹⁴

2) *Futūḥ* accounts were also collected for another reason: so that various individuals, families, or tribes could advance a claim, true or spurious, to have participated in the stirring events of the “golden age” of early Islam. The result was a kind of hybrid account, combining elements of Islamic historicizing legitimation and genealogical legitimation. Consider, for example, the following account describing Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, the Muslim commander at the battle of al-Qādisiyya:¹⁵

al-Sarī ← Shu‘ayb ← Sayf ← al-Qāsim ibn Sulaym ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa’dī ← ‘Uthmān ibn Rajā’ al-Sa’dī, who said: Sa’d ibn Mālīk¹⁶ was the boldest and bravest of the army. He stationed himself in an unfortified palace between the two lines, and looked out from it on the army. If

¹²Or, “to embrace Islām” (*an tuslimū*).

¹³*Ibid.*, I, 2260.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, I, 2239–44. One wonders whether the account of the battle of Yarmūk in Theophanes, in which a dust storm suddenly arises at a critical moment and blows in the face of the Byzantines, does not derive from a Muslim account, but I have not found a corresponding story in the Muslim sources (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 337–38, cited in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 145).

¹⁵Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2362. On hybridization, see below, 212–24.

¹⁶I.e. Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ.

the lines had exposed him for even a short time¹⁷ he would have been utterly lost, but by God, the terror of those days did not oppress or worry him.

This account not only glorifies the conquests by presenting the leader of the Muslims at al-Qādisiyya as a man of indomitable *sang-froid*, it also provides a dose of ancestral glory for Sa'd's descendants—including those stated in the *isnād* to have conveyed the account.¹⁸ Other accounts of this kind, often serving to glorify the deeds of a particular tribe, are fairly common in the *futūḥ* narratives,¹⁹ and may have been especially useful in establishing a person's or group's status against rivals. Yet we must note that for such claims to have been advanced, the conception of the *futūḥ* as a crucial event in the community's early history had already to be established.

3) Some accounts relating information about the conquests may have originated as pious exhortations to engage in what we may term "religious battle." Such accounts do not use the term *futūḥ*—a term which clearly has teleological overtones of divine assistance to the community as a whole—but employ instead the more neutral term *ghazwa*, "raiding." Their purpose seems to have been to encourage the hearer to fulfil his *personal* duty to wage *jihād*, which they do by describing how *ghazwa* had been conducted under the Prophet and the early caliphs.²⁰

In sum, we may postulate the following sequence of events in the early evolution of the *futūḥ* theme. During the first century AH, some individuals circulated stories stressing tribal and personal valor in various battles, in the manner of the *ayyām al-'arab* tales that had hitherto been an important part of their tribesmen's oral culture, in order to enhance the standing of their own family or tribe. Such stories could be very early—going back to the period immediately following the conquests themselves; but they served the purposes of genealogical legitimation in the *jāhili* tradition, rather than historical legitimation in

¹⁷Literally, "the interval between two milkings of a she-camel" (*fuwāqa nāqatin*).

¹⁸Although I have been unable to identify further the two Sa'dis given in the *isnād*, the *nisba* al-Sa'dī, in addition to referring to many tribal groups, was also used by descendants of Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqās: see Ibn al-Athīr, *Lubāb*, II, 117–18.

¹⁹E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2355 (via Ibn Ishāq), a pro-Nakha' tradition on al-Qādisiyya.

²⁰For example, see Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, 93 (no. 104), 96 (no. 113).

an Islamic context.²¹ Other people, of more pious bent, related some stories about the conquests as a way of affirming the religious duty of Believers to engage in *ghazwa* for the faith. Neither of these activities was originally linked to the creation of *futūḥ* narratives; but both kinds of accounts, although intended for quite different purposes, could serve as raw material for the nascent Islamic community as it began to grapple intellectually with its own identity and with its position as the ruling community that dominated others. During this process, which seems to have begun in the latter part of the first century AH, Muslims felt a need to relate the events of the conquest in ways that provided justification for Muslim and Arab rule. To put such accounts together, the architects of them drew on the *ayyām*-type and the “religious battle” stories that were presumably already in circulation, as well as on personal reminiscences, documents of treaties, etc. In the process, there sometimes emerged the “hybrid” tribal-Islamic accounts; this probably took place during the late first and second centuries AH.

The *futūḥ* theme, with its implicit legitimization of Muslim hegemony over non-Muslims, was especially valuable to the rulers of the Islamic state, who—particularly in the first Islamic centuries—constituted a tiny Muslim minority greatly outnumbered by their non-Muslim subjects. It is therefore natural to assume that the Umayyads may have played a key role in encouraging the cultivation of *futūḥ* narratives.²² The existing *futūḥ* books are essentially composites of two kinds of material. On the one hand, they contain reports on the appointment and dismissal of commanders, etc., which see the conquests from the central government’s point of view. The bulk of this information is of Medinese origin; since the early conquests were directed from Medina, the Medinese might be expected to have preserved some information about such matters.²³ On the other hand, the extant *futūḥ* books also con-

²¹Compare the reconstruction proposed here with the more skeptical view of Conrad, “The Conquest of Arwād,” esp. 387–88 on the *ayyām* narratives.

²²Umayyad involvement is suggested by the fact that their chief administrator, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā, wrote an epistle that perfectly exemplifies the idea that the conquests were an expression of God’s favor for the Muslims; see ‘Abbās, ed., ‘*Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā*, 273–74 (epistle no. 26).

²³For example, the lengthy report from al-Zuhrī (a Medinese with close ties to the Umayyads) in al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 452–66 (no. 9770).

tain much material on events “in the field”—battles on various fronts, treaties with various cities and localities, etc. This material seems to be derived mainly from regional or local sources—Iraqi, Syrian, etc.²⁴

This pattern of evidence in the existing *futūḥ* books suggests a possible scenario for the coalescence of early Islamic *futūḥ* historiography. The Umayyads, who from the time of ‘Abd al-Malik (65–86/685–705) on seem to have supervised an increasingly clear articulation of the Muslim community as a distinct monotheist confession, began to encourage the recounting and collection of reports about how the conquests had been organized and how they had proceeded. Their purpose was to establish what we might call a narrative weapon to bolster their claims to hegemony over their vast non-Muslim populations, by relating the conquests’ apparently miraculous success;²⁵ and in doing so, they relied heavily on Medinese scholars who had access to information on how the campaigns of conquest had been conducted. Once a nucleus of *futūḥ* narratives began to crystallize, local materials relating to the conquest of individual provinces or towns—whatever their original narrative purposes may have been—could readily be woven into the expanding fabric of *futūḥ* material.

As we have seen,²⁶ the *futūḥ* material collected during the first and second centuries was later reworked again, to establish guidelines relating to matters of land tenure, taxation, and administration that had, it seems, been little on the minds of the earlier compilers—giving rise,

²⁴For example, the historian Sa‘īd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Tanūkhī (d. ca. 167/784) appears to have been an important compiler of earlier Syrian *futūḥ* accounts that he garnered from earlier transmitters. A typical example of the kind of sober reports he conveyed is the account of the conquest of the Syrian coast found in al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 126–27 (= Hitti, 124) (← Sa‘īd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ← al-Waḍīn ibn ‘Aṭā’). See Conrad, “Al-Azdī’s History,” 50; also Donner, “The Problem of Early Arabic Historiography in Syria,” 21–25; Rotter, “Abū Zur‘a,” 100–102.

²⁵This activity was a literary counterpart to the architectural weaponry ‘Abd al-Malik deployed by sponsoring construction of the Dome of the Rock on the site of the temple in Jerusalem, and the theological weaponry he installed in the form of anti-trinitarian inscriptions in the Dome. The theological weaponry also included theological tracts emphasizing God’s favor for the Muslims: see Reinink, “Pseudo-Methodius und die Legende vom römischen Endkaiser,” esp. 104–105; Kaegi, “Initial Byzantine Reactions,” Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 163.

²⁶See above, 172.

in the process, to “secondary” accounts that addressed these issues. All considered, it seems most likely that the categorization of *futūḥ* accounts on a regional or local basis took place mainly during this secondary stage, since only in it would links to specific localities be necessary or desirable—indeed, indispensable.

Khilāfa (Caliphate)²⁷

Another theme relating to the issue of Muslim hegemony is the theme of *khilāfa*. Whereas the theme of *futūḥ* strives to demonstrate that the establishment of Muslim rule in various places was an expression of God’s design, the theme of *khilāfa* is a BOUNDARY theme, concerned with showing that the Muslim state’s hegemony in later years was a legitimate heir to the hegemony first established during the conquests. This it attempts to do by demonstrating the continuity in the central institution of the early Islamic state—its political leadership, the caliphate. The relatively simpler nature of this task (compared with that of *futūḥ*) is partly responsible for the fact that the theme of *khilāfa* is far less extensively developed in Islamic historiography. On the most basic level, its purpose is fulfilled simply by compiling lists of successive caliphs and their dates of rule, or the length of time they ruled, which means it was closely linked with efforts to establish chronological order in the origins narratives.²⁸ Early lists of caliphs probably formed part of the basic organizing framework on which later, larger historical compilations were based, and one frequently encounters telltale residues of these lists even in the largest compilations, such as the brief accounts stating the exact length of reign of a particular caliph (usually placed after accounts of his death).²⁹ A few survivals of such lists may also be found in Syriac chronicles, which presumably received the information from now-lost Arabic prototypes. An interesting example is the anonymous Syriac *Chronicle of 775*, which includes a list of the years of rule of Muḥammad and the early caliphs, but simply says “no ruler” for the years of the First Civil War, thus pointedly leaving the name of ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib off the list—clearly a reflection of pro-Umayyad

²⁷Cf. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 37–38; Noth/Conrad, 35–37.

²⁸On the creation of chronological schemes, see Chapter 10 below.

²⁹E.g. al-Tabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 3050–52 on length of ‘Uthmān’s reign—years, months, days.

political views of the author's Syrian informants.³⁰ One of the earliest of such caliphal lists of which we have record is the *Asnān al-khulafā'* of al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742);³¹ this fact, and the Syriac source just noted, suggest that, once again, it may have been the later Umayyads who sponsored the first attempts to compile information on *khilāfa* as a way of demonstrating the continuity (and hence the legitimacy) of their own rule.³²

To this basic listing or chronological framework of caliphs, there soon came to be attached diverse information on the activities of various caliphs (or anti-caliphs, such as 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, depending on who made the list). Some of this may have furthered the concerns of the *khilāfa* theme, such as the monograph by Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) on the election of Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam as caliph and other events of the Second Civil War.³³ As Noth has pointed out, however, much of what is related about various caliphs really belongs to a literature of personal characterization of the ruler—his genealogy, physical appearance, clothing, and especially anecdotes revealing his moral qualities—for which reason, Noth aptly refers to it as *sīrat al-khulafā'* material.³⁴ This *sīrat al-khulafā'* material, however, seems to have as its purpose mainly the moral evaluation of the caliphs described, an undertaking that is commonly linked with debates over leadership, particularly the theme of *fitna*. For this reason, we choose to consider *sīrat al-khulafā'* a distinct historiographical theme, separate from *khilāfa*, and defer fuller consideration of it to our treatment of themes related to the issue of leadership in the next chapter.

³⁰Brooks, ed., *Chronica Minora*, III, 348 (text), 247 (trans.). [= *CSCO, Scriptores Syri*, 5-6, 337-49 (text), 265-75 (trans.)]. Rule of "Hagarenes" over Syria begins in year 933 of era of Alexander; Muḥammad (10 years), Abū Bakr (1 year), 'Umar (12 years), 'Uthmān (12 years), no ruler (5 years, *sine rege annos quinque*), Mu'āwiya (20 years).

³¹On this work, see the comments below, 239 (including a surviving excerpt).

³²Rotter, "Abū Zur'a," 92; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 214 n. 104.

³³*Kitāb Marj Rāhiṭ wa-bay'at Marwān wa-maqtal al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays*: Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 93; trans. Dodge, 201. This work is not listed in *GAS*.

³⁴Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 37-38; Noth/Conrad, 37.

CHAPTER 8

THEMES OF LEADERSHIP

THE ISSUES CONSIDERED in the preceding three chapters—Prophecy, Community, and Hegemony—all address, in one way or another, the question of the Muslim community's relations with non-Muslims. The issue to be explored in this chapter bears primarily on intracommunal questions, i.e. problems of how the Muslims regulated affairs among themselves. The issue of leadership was articulated primarily in five themes we shall term *fitna*, *sīrat al-khulafā'*, pre-Islamic Arabia, *ridda*, and pre-Islamic Iran.

Fitna¹

One of the most important themes of early Islamic historiography, and of the later compilations that drew on it, was the theme of *fitna* ("temptation," "sedition"), which referred to religio-political clashes within the Muslim community itself, particularly the "civil wars" in which different Muslims contended for leadership of the community. That is, it focused clearly on the question of who should be *imām* or caliph.² It is primarily a BOUNDARY theme, in that it articulates the basis for

¹On the *fitna* theme, see Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 34–36; Noth/Conrad, 33–35.

²The *khilāfa* (caliphate) theme, by comparison, emphasizes the continuity in the existence of the position as a reflection of communal continuity; but to some extent the themes *khilāfa* and *fitna* obviously overlap.

the distinctive identities of various groups (parties, sects) within the Islamic community.³

In a sense, this theme represents historicizing legitimization in Islam *par excellence*, since the purpose of many *fitna* accounts is to describe how leadership of the community was won (or lost) by a particular person or party through a sequence of mundane events, and to lament or celebrate those events. The events themselves can be viewed either from the victor's side as divine confirmation of his claim to rule, or from the loser's vantage point as an explanation of how the "legitimate" candidate (legitimate on moral or genealogical or other grounds) was deprived of his rightful rule by deceit or oppressive force. In either case, however, such accounts link the question of legitimacy directly to particular historical events, by means of a narrative.

We may include under this rubric—*fitna*—the many accounts that we find in later compilations dealing with the following episodes in the history of early Islam: the mutiny against 'Uthmān and its causes; the aftermath of 'Uthmān's murder, particularly the election of 'Alī as caliph and the activities of the main contenders in subsequent events—Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, 'Ā'isha, Ṭalḥa ibn 'Ubayd Allāh, al-Zubayr ibn al-'Awwām; the battle of the Camel and its background; the battle of Ṣiffīn and its background; the rise of the Khārijites and early battles against them at Nahrawān and elsewhere; the arbitration between the representatives of 'Alī and Mu'āwiya and its consequences; the raids (*ghārāt*) between Mu'āwiya and 'Alī after the failure of arbitration to resolve the dispute; the murder of 'Alī and attempted murder of Mu'āwiya; al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī's relinquishment of his claim to Mu'āwiya; the agitation led by Ḥujr ibn 'Adī al-Kindī; the refusal of Ibn al-Zubayr to recognize Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya as caliph, and his lengthy rebellion against the Umayyads; the death of al-Ḥusayn and his followers at Karbalā' and its background; the rebellion of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī 'Ubayd in al-Kūfa; the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ and its background; all other events of the Second Civil War. In fact, since the political rivalries that underlay this theme remained current, the theme of *fitna* was open-ended; it in-

³ A particular event or set of events might, of course, be seen as the *arché* for the formation of such a group, but would only be an event of *inception* if the group diverged so completely as to consider itself, and be considered, no longer part of the Muslim community.

cludes all political rivalries up to the age of the high caliphate, including the 'Abbāsīd revolution, 'Alid rebellions against both Umayyads and 'Abbāsīds, Khārijite revolts, etc.

Since the question of the caliphate or imāmate became in time a competition of rival lineages of Quraysh, more or less to the exclusion of other groups, it is not surprising to find that most of the *fitna* materials contained in the later compilations concentrate on intra-Quraysh clashes—particularly the rivalry between the 'Alids and the 'Abbāsīds. Other Quraysh groups—mostly the Umayyads and, rarely, the Zubayrids—are the subject of some accounts, but these two groups, which were essentially irrelevant to the political arena after their respective falls from political power in 132/750 and 73/692, are much less prominent in most collections of the second and third centuries than are the 'Alids and the 'Abbāsīds, the two main surviving contenders after 132/750.

The Khārijites, although mostly non-Quraysh, also continue to receive some coverage in accounts within the *fitna* theme, both because of their continuing militant activity, which did not cease until well after the period when the Islamic historiographical tradition crystallized in the second and third centuries AH, and because of their role in the First Civil War in opposition to 'Alī—a fact that, for differing reasons, was brought up both by the Shī'a and by their opponents in relating the First Civil War. Other non-Quraysh groups receive far less coverage in most extant collections, having become irrelevant to political debate after the first century, although they may have been quite important in earlier times; one finds hardly an echo of the Qaḥṭānī claims to the caliphate, for example, in al-Ṭabarī or al-Balādhurī, although apocalyptic traditions from this faction have survived elsewhere.⁴

⁴The term *fitna* in early Islamic discourse referred not only to disputes over leadership within the Islamic community, but also to the anticipated upheavals that would presage the impending apocalypse. *Fitan* (plural of *fitna*) in this apocalyptic sense should be kept clearly separate from our own (and Noth's) use of the term *fitna* to refer to the theme focusing on issues of political legitimation and sedition. In both cases the term is used metaphorically. The basic meaning of Arabic *fitna* is "temptation," particularly either sexual or political; the First and Second Civil Wars, which pitted Believers against one another, is pejoratively termed *fitna* by orthodox tradition because much of the squabbling arose from the temptation to

When and where did the *fitna* theme arise? The question of communal leadership obviously first came to a head during the First Civil War itself (34–40/655–61), although no concrete evidence exists for the collection of *fitna* accounts at such an early date. Stray individual accounts that must date back at least to the period of the Second Civil War (60–73/680–92), however, can be identified.⁵ The first monograph devoted to a *fitna* sub-theme that we can identify was the *Kitāb al-ṣhūrā wa-maqtal al-Ḥusayn* by ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. 103/721).⁶ Numerous books on episodes belonging to this theme—the battle of the Camel, death of ‘Alī, Ṣiffin, death of al-Ḥusayn, Nahrawān, etc.—began to appear by the middle and later second century AH, including works by Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774), Sayf ibn ‘Umar (d. ca. 180/796), Abū Ḥudhayfa Ishāq ibn Bishr (d. 206/821), and many others.⁷

Since the theme of *fitna* addressed primarily the intra-communal question of political and religious leadership, it seems likely that the Shī‘a in Iraq may have been the first to collect and circulate accounts of events of the First Civil War, and so may have inaugurated the *fitna* theme. As one of the losing parties in the First Civil War, they had a powerful incentive for recalling the course of events, narratives of which were needed to justify their continued resistance to Umayyad rule and their continued support of the political claims of ‘Alī’s descendants.⁸ Certainly narrative accounts (especially about the *fitna* theme) continued to be cultivated among the Shī‘a—consider, for example, the

seize mundane power—hence our use of the term *fitna* to refer to the historiographical theme. The accounts of a Qaḥṭānī deliverer are apocalyptic, not historical; yet it should be noted that the apocalyptic *fitna* accounts and those dealing with past disputes over communal leadership are not unrelated, the apocalyptic variety representing a still unrealized dream of a possible solution to the question of political leadership. They have, therefore, obvious political relevance. On such apocalyptic traditions, see below, 228–29.

⁵See, for example, the account studied in Madelung, “‘Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī.”

⁶GAS, I, 277.

⁷Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 34–36, and Noth/Conrad, 33–35, provide a list of early works.

⁸On some early Shī‘ī accounts in the collection of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Lahī‘a, see Kister, “On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih.”

Maqātil al-ṭālibīyīn of Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. 356/967).⁹ This Shī'ī "martyrology" related how the various descendants of Abū Ṭālib (all of them, of course, considered by the Shī'a of al-Iṣbahānī's time as members of a "holy family" with a special right to rule) met their deaths at the hands of tyrants (often Umayyad), and hence were unjustly kept from assuming the position of spiritual and political leadership that was legitimately theirs. The Shī'ī claim was essentially genealogical (and gnostic) in principle, but they developed extensive historical justification for their continued aspiration to power, despite sustained failure to gain it.¹⁰

Compared with the Shī'a, other groups had far less incentive to initiate a narrative tradition about the civil wars. The Umayyads actually held power, and hence had little need for narratives as a form of legitimation for their rule until challenged by pro-'Alid accounts; once pro-'Alid narratives about the First Civil War began to circulate, however, as we have seen, the Umayyads were not slow to gather their own collections of narratives that presented the events from their point of view.¹¹ The Khārijites, pietistic and activist in their early days, felt little need for historical justification at first; their emphasis in this period was on living by the revealed law and on confronting evil, and thus preparing their way to the afterlife. If they perished in the process, they earned a passage to paradise—or so, at least, they believed; hence the Khārijites' recounting of temporal setbacks at the hands of the evil-doers was not undertaken to justify their claim to rule, only (in their poetry) to lament that they, as survivors, had not joined their more ardent former companions in the gardens of everlasting bliss.¹² The Zubayrids' political aspirations were terminated too early to permit

⁹On him and his work see *EI*², "Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī" (M. Nallino); Günther, *Quellenuntersuchungen*.

¹⁰Kister, "On the Papyrus of Wahn b. Munabbih," 563, notes that this compilation may offer evidence that stories with clearly Shī'ī tendency were already in wide circulation at the end of the first century AH.

¹¹Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1284–88: 'Abd al-Malik asks 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr for information on Abū Sufyān.

¹²See 'Abbās, ed., *Shi'r al-khawārij*, Introduction; also poems no. 25, v. 3; no. 49, v. 1; no. 279, v. 7. See also Donner, "Piety and Eschatology in Early Khārijite Poetry."

the development of a significant body of reports backing their claims, although a few traces of such reports do remain.¹³

The notion that the Shī'a of Iraq (specifically, of al-Kūfa) may have been largely responsible for initiating the *fitna* theme during the Umayyad period appears to be confirmed by its general outlines as a theme. The theme reflects, as a glance at its main chapters suggests, a decidedly anti-Umayyad agenda—implying that the Umayyad rulers were tyrants against whom valiant Shī'ī partisans repeatedly raised rebellion, and in its original Shī'ī form this theme presumably looked ahead to the anticipated overthrow of the tyrants by a proper 'Alid restorer of legitimate rule. Even though many pro-Umayyad or anti-Shī'a accounts are to be found in extant collections of material, the contours of the *fitna* theme as a whole seem to have been sketched out by the Shī'a. That this theme was incorporated wholesale into the later Sunnī historical tradition can only be understood by looking quickly at later political events. The classic compilations of Sunnī historiography, where today we find the accounts of the *fitna* theme enshrined, were written under the rule of the 'Abbāsīd dynasty. But the 'Abbāsīds' revolutionary movement, which succeeded in overthrowing the Umayyads in 132/750, arose from the bosom of the Shī'īs,¹⁴ and they subsequently took over the bulk of the Shī'ī narrative tradition justifying their opposition to Umayyad rule—the core of the *fitna* theme. This they edited lightly, appending a final chapter in which they, the 'Abbāsīds, rise, victorious through God's grace, to power and leadership of the Islamic community—at the expense of both Umayyads and 'Alids.¹⁵ This "hijacking" of the substance of the originally Shī'ī theme of *fitna* was possible because the 'Abbāsīds, like the 'Alids, were members of the Prophet's clan of Hāshim.¹⁶ It is in this way that the originally Shī'ī theme of *fitna* became integrated into the core of the early Islamic

¹³Madelung, "'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī."

¹⁴See especially Sharon, *Black Banners from the East*.

¹⁵See Arazi and El'ad, "'L'épître à l'armée,'" on 'Abbāsīd appropriation of aspects of Shī'ī ideology. The large amount of pro-'Alid material in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*, which was written under (and at the behest of) the early 'Abbāsīds, suggests the degree to which the 'Abbāsīds felt comfortable inheriting Shī'ī historiography on this theme.

¹⁶The Shī'a reacted to this "hijacking" after 132/750 by creating accounts showing Muḥammad's favor for 'Alī over al-'Abbās, by emphasizing the fact that 'Alī had

("Sunnī") historiographical tradition, rather than remaining an artifact of merely sectarian interest. It also explains why, in describing the evolution of political leadership in the early Islamic community, classical Sunnī and Shī'ī historiography of the third century AH and later tell essentially the same story, and differ only in the moral judgments passed on the various participants.

Sīrat al-khulafā'¹⁷

The historical compilations of the third century AH and later provide some information about the activities of various caliphs (or anti-caliphs—Ibn al-Zubayr, etc.); however, this information is disappointingly thin, from our point of view. As Noth has pointed out, much of what is related about various caliphs really belongs to a literature of personal characterization of the ruler—his genealogy, physical appearance, clothing, and especially anecdotes relating his words or deeds in a particular situation—for which reason, Noth aptly refers to it as *sīrat al-khulafā'* material. In annalistic compilations, one frequently finds clusters of such accounts following reports about a caliph's death, where they offer a kind of summary evaluation of his life; for example, following the reports in al-Ṭabarī's *Annals* about the death of the second caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, one finds a section containing clusters of accounts on his descent, his designation as "al-Fārūq," his appearance, his birthdate and age at death, his wives and children, the time of his conversion to Islam, and concluding with a group of "reports on some of his actions (*dhikr ba'd siyarihi*)."¹⁸

As mentioned above, some of these accounts describe the actions or words of the caliph in a particular situation, frequently a situation that lacks historical context. The following example, related on the authority of the early traditionist Ka'b al-Aḥbār, illustrates this quality:

I stayed with a man called Mālīk, who had been a neighbor¹⁹ of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and said to him: "What's the best

married the Prophet's daughter Fāṭima, etc. See Sharon, "Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam."

¹⁷See Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 37–38; Noth/Conrad, 35–37.

¹⁸This section is found at al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2728–48.

¹⁹Or "someone under the protection of. . ." (*jār*).

way to see the commander of the Believers?" He said: "He has no door or [other] barrier; he says the prayer, then sits down, and whoever wants to speak to him does so."²⁰

Not only does the account float without mooring in any specific historical moment, it is clearly an effort to associate with 'Umar ideals of simplicity and accessibility that were evidently valued by some at the time the account came into circulation. As mentioned above, the ahistorical quality of accounts such as this one makes them akin to many *ḥadīths*, and in one sense this kind of material really belongs in the domain of moral or pious legitimation, rather than strictly historical legitimation, in that so much of it tries to establish the moral rectitude, or lack of it, of the individual under consideration.²¹ However, in these cases the moral issue is intertwined with a concern for historical legitimation, for the moral qualities of the particular caliph are deemed significant because of the historical role played by the caliph in question. For example, Mu'āwiyā's virtues or vices are emphasized by pro-Umayyad and by Shī'ī tradition respectively, because the former needed to justify Umayyad rule, and the latter needed to demonstrate that he was "by nature" unjust and hence capable of consciously plotting to deprive 'Alī, the legitimate ruler in the Shī'ī view, of the caliphate. To this extent, the *sīrat al-khulafā'* material appears to be an application of the tools of pious or moral legitimation to the concerns of the *fitna* theme, and is therefore best seen as an outgrowth of this theme.

The heavily moral, ahistorical character of so much of the information about the early caliphs (and about their governors and other men and women of affairs as well) is palpable throughout the tradition; one needs only to try making a meaningful synthesis of the many surviving accounts about a caliph to realize this. The several hundred pages about Mu'āwiyā found in compilations such as al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*, al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, and Ibn 'Asākir's *Ta'rikh madīnat*

²⁰Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2738 (Muḥammad ibn 'Awf ← Abū l-Mughīra 'Abd al-Qaddūs ibn al-Ḥajjāj ← Ṣafwān ibn 'Amr ← Abū l-Mukhārīq Zuhayr ibn Sālim ← Ka'b al-Aḥbār).

²¹An exceptional case is provided by the *Sīrat 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz* of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871)—a biography of an Umayyad caliph deemed virtuous even by enemies of the Umayyad house.

Dimashq, for example, abound in anecdotes and tell us about several major episodes that took place during his reign (such as the mutiny and execution of Ḥujr ibn ‘Adī al-Kindī, numerous Khārījite uprisings, etc.); but it is difficult, or impossible, to place these anecdotes, and even the major episodes, in a binding sequence. It is even more futile to attempt to secure any sense of how Mu‘āwīya’s thinking may have evolved over the twenty years of his rule (or even over his whole lifetime). Rather, he is presented by each tradition as imbued with a fixed set of character traits, for which the anecdote or episode essentially serves as a mirror.²²

The tendency of the tradition to view individuals as possessed of a single, unchanging character—legacy, perhaps, of the Qur’ān’s own way of viewing people as “ideal types”²³—sometimes created vexing problems that had to be either ignored or resolved by sheer ingenuity. A striking example involves the characterization of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān (ruled 23–35/644–56). On the one hand, ‘Uthmān was widely vilified for having caused, or at the very least having failed to control, the painful dissension that broke out during his reign and led to his murder, plunging the community into five years of bitter strife during the First Civil War. The accusations against him included charges of nepotism, unseemly love of luxury, desire for material gain, and deceitful behavior. Seen through these lenses, ‘Uthmān was morally “bad,” and indeed, portraying him as the villain made it easier to exculpate other participants in the First Civil War—most of them, after all, revered Companions of the Prophet, such as ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām—from charges of crass lust for power, rebelliousness, etc. On the other hand, ‘Uthmān was known by everyone to have been among the Prophet’s earliest and most ardent supporters, who had liberally used his great wealth in the Prophet’s cause; moreover, his close relation to the Prophet had been sealed by his marriage to the Prophet’s daughter Ruqayya. It was commonly known, too, that he been selected by a blue-ribbon panel of early Com-

²²Much the same applies also to the depiction of later historical figures. See, for example, the comments of Eisener, *Zwischen Faktum und Fiktion*, 249. Further discussion of the “hybridization” of moral or pious legitimation with historical legitimation is found below, 212–24.

²³See above, 75–79, on the Qur’ānic view of personality.

panions to serve as caliph, a fact that could surely be taken as a vote of confidence in his high moral stature from the most revered members of the early community of Believers, including the aforementioned 'Alī and al-Zubayr. All of this suggested that 'Uthmān had once been morally "good," so good in fact that the leading Believers chose him to lead the community—unless one wanted to argue that the Believers had made a grave mistake in choosing him, a position that was unthinkable because the whole thrust of the tradition came to be that God was guiding the Believers. The only solution to this dilemma was to find a way to portray 'Uthmān as having undergone a character change—a transformation, however, almost unique in Muslim annals, in which individuals are generally marked with indelible character traits, and in which turning from light to darkness is virtually unthinkable.

The dilemma was resolved by relating a story about the Prophet's signet ring. According to these accounts, the Prophet, on his deathbed, handed his signet ring over to his eventual successor, the first caliph, Abū Bakr. The ring was then handed on from Abū Bakr to the second caliph, 'Umar, and by him to 'Uthmān. 'Uthmān, however, carelessly let the ring drop off his finger into one of the wells of Medina, from which it was never recovered.²⁴ The symbolism of the story is obvious: the loss of the Prophet's ring signals 'Uthmān's loss of God's guidance and support, and the negation of his claim to be the Prophet's legitimate political successor. It thus makes possible the depiction of 'Uthmān as a figure virtually unique in Islamic historiography, one who underwent a profound change of character. Only in this way could he be presented both as a revered Companion of the Prophet and, only a short time later, as an inept, if not positively evil, ruler. The sharp demarcation is reflected in accounts that describe 'Uthmān's reign as consisting of six good years followed by six bad years,²⁵ with the loss of the signet ring marking the decisive point of change.

In view of this, one may despair of being able to say anything about the history of the early caliphs. How can we, when the information in the accounts about them often serves moralistic, rather than historical,

²⁴E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2856–58.

²⁵E.g. Ibn Sallām al-Ibādī, *Kitāb Ibn Sallām*, 125.

purposes? We must not forget, however, that even moralizing pieces of this kind that were fabricated had to fit within historical episodes whose outlines were generally accepted as fact at that time. For example, we may wish to challenge the way Mu'āwiya is presented by some accounts of his treatment of Ḥujr ibn 'Adī, just as we may wish to challenge the way Ḥujr is presented in some accounts, but we can hardly challenge the fact that someone named Ḥujr ibn 'Adī did participate in some kind of disturbance that led to his execution by Mu'āwiya.

Some information on the early caliphs may have been included in compilations dealing with *futūḥ*, since those caliphs were involved in the conquest movement.²⁶ Be that as it may, we also know the titles of a number of compilations on *sīrat al-khulafā'*, dating from the late first and the second century AH, and surviving accounts of this kind found in extant compilations may have been drawn from these earlier works, although since most of the works themselves are lost it is impossible to say exactly what they contained. The *Kitāb al-shūrā wa-maqtal 'Uthmān* ("The Elective Council and the Killing of 'Uthmān") of al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) may well have contained, in addition to the material obviously belonging to the *fitna* theme suggested by the title, some "character sketches" not only of 'Alī and members of his entourage, but also of the caliphs 'Uthmān and Mu'āwiya, the Meccan leaders Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr, and other main actors in this chapter of the Shī'ī martyrology.²⁷ Al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. 107/725) reportedly compiled a now-lost work on *maghāzī* which covered the early caliphate up to the beginnings of the First Civil War,²⁸ which also may have included some *sīrat al-khulafā'* material. 'Āṣim ibn 'Umar ibn Qatāda (d. 120/737) lectured on the *manāqib al-ṣaḥāba* or "Noteworthy deeds (or traits) of the Companions,"²⁹ which we can expect to have included much information of this kind on the early caliphs and their associates. Although al-Zuhri's *Asnān al-khulafā'*, mentioned above, was probably mainly chronological in content, it may well have

²⁶This association is suggested by Sezgin in *GAS*, I, 255.

²⁷A fragment is preserved in Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, IX, 49–58 ('Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam ← Ismā'īl ibn Abī Khālid). Pace Sezgin in *GAS*, I, 277, the title is not *Kitāb al-shūrā wa-maqtal al-Ḥusayn*.

²⁸*GAS*, I, 279.

²⁹*Ibid.*, I, 279–80.

contained some *sīrat al-khulafā'* material; the same may be true of his lost *Nasab Quraysh*. The first compilation explicitly devoted to the lives of early caliphs appears to be the *Kitāb sīrat Mu'āwiya wa-Banī Umayya* of 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 147/764).³⁰ The famous compiler Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) produced a number of monographs on the *fitna* theme, which probably included *sīrat al-khulafā'* material.³¹ 'Alī ibn Mujāhid (d. 182/798) wrote a *Kitāb akhbār al-Umayyīn*, and al-Naḍr ibn Ḥadīd (d. ca. 235/849) compiled an *Akhbār 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr*.³²

This material, providing "character sketches" of various individuals, was used selectively by later compilers to fill out their overarching interpretation of Islamic history. Many extant compilers, working after the fall of the Umayyads in 132/750, articulated their view of the history of the caliphate according to the 'Abbāsids' modified continuation of the Shī'ī-inspired theme of *fitna*, which viewed the Umayyad era as one of almost unrelieved tyranny and oppression. Hence, it represented a stage in the history of the Islamic community that was referred to derogatorily as *mulk* ("[mere] kingship") or *jawr* ("oppression"), following after and as a consequence of the First Civil War (*fitna*) and preceding the phase of *dawla* (the restoration of legitimate rule, identified with the 'Abbāsids). But some individual pro-Umayyad accounts have survived, even in works as well-known as al-Ṭabarī's *Annals*.³³

³⁰*Ibid.*, I, 307–308; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 91; trans. Dodge, 197.

³¹*GAS*, I, 308–309; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 93; trans. Dodge, 201–202. See also Ursula Sezgin, *Abū Miḥnaf*, esp. 39–65 and 99–187.

³²*GAS*, I, 312. Neither work is listed in the *Fihrist*.

³³E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 2095, 2100–2101, which portray Abū Sufyān participating actively in the conquests at Yarmūk; or *ibid.*, I, 2949–54, in which 'Uthmān meticulously rebuts the charges raised against him in the First Civil War; or *ibid.*, I, 3012–14, in which several of the Umayyads' later rivals are shown as being on 'Uthmān's side against the rebels, who are loathed by the populace of Medina and the garrison towns. A few more pro-Umayyad accounts are offered in al-Haythamī (or al-Haytamī), *Tathīr al-janān wa-l-lisān*, a work explicitly grounded in the later (third-century?) Sunnī notion that it is the Muslims' duty to love all Companions of the Prophet (*Tathīr*, 4). See also Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), *Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, 913–15.

Pre-Islamic Arabian History

Another historical theme that appears to have been of interest to some Believers quite early in the Islamic era was the history (and legends) of parts of pre-Islamic Arabia. It is a theme of PREPARATION, growing out of the competition among various tribal groups of Arabian origin for status and leadership within the new community. This they hoped to bolster by garnering accounts showing their tribe's heritage of pre-Islamic greatness—a fact that makes it, as a theme, a kind of historiographical variant of genealogical legitimation. For Arabians of Yemeni origin, this took the form of reminding others of the past glories of the South Arabian kingdoms;³⁴ for North Arabian tribesmen, it was done by recounting (or inventing?) their heroism in battle and their noble generosity of bygone days.³⁵

Several early works on this theme are known from later references and quotations, and a few have even survived. 'Abīd ibn Sharyā (d. ca. 50/ 670) wrote *Akhbār al-Yaman* ("Accounts about Yemen"),³⁶ and a half-century later Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110/ 728 or 114) composed his *Kitāb al-mulūk al-mutawwaja min Ḥimyar* ("The Crowned Kings of Ḥimyar").³⁷ From the late Umayyad period come works such as Muqātil al-Aḥwal's monograph on the death of Kulayb ibn Rabī'a, a hero of the pre-Islamic Basūs war between the tribes of Bakr and Taghlib, and 'Āmir ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Misma'i's work on the struggle between these two tribes.³⁸ Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) wrote monographs on the same theme,³⁹ and by the end of the second cen-

³⁴Numerous references in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, e.g. I, 1039–41 (← Hishām ibn Muḥammad).

³⁵Particularly the *ayyām al-'arab* narratives; on them see *EI* ², "Ayyām al-'arab" (E. Mittwoch); Caskel, "Aijām al-'arab," 1–99.

³⁶On this author, whose very existence has been the subject of much dispute, see Crosby, *Akhbār al-Yaman*; *GAS*, I, 260.

³⁷*GAS*, I, 306. It is possible that his *Kitāb al-mubtada'*, and other early *sīra* works such as the *Mubtada'* of al-Sha'bī (d. 103), contained material on the pre-Islamic Arabia theme, although one would expect such works to include predominantly Qur'ān-related narratives describing pre-Islamic prophets and communities.

³⁸On both works, see *GAS*, I, 265.

³⁹*Kitāb ḥurrāb al-Basūs bayna Bakr wa-Taghlib ibnay Wā'il ibn Qāsī and Kulayb ibn Rabī'a*. See *GAS*, I, 290.

ture AH many more works on north and south Arabian history had appeared.⁴⁰

It thus appears that interest in pre-Islamic Arabian history crystallized quite early as an historiographical theme, probably already by the middle and later first century AH, as an extension of efforts to claim legitimacy through genealogical means. As a theme, it continued to flourish during the later first and second centuries, when political and social rivalries between various Arab tribes, or coalitions of tribes, were especially acute.⁴¹ It was not, at any rate, an expression of simple historical curiosity, but firmly grounded in the search for legitimation within the community.

The circulation of apocalyptic visions of the future, emphasizing the glorious victory of one or another group could be another way of establishing the claims of one's group—essentially an exercise in writing the history of the future, rather than of the past.⁴² For Quraysh in particular, and for a few other tribes, their close ties to the sanctuary in Mecca could be expatiated upon to enhance their status.⁴³ Finally, both north and south Arabians could further bolster their claims to status in the Muslim community by relating their ancestors' clashes with the Sasanian empire, which in some circles came to be seen as an emblem of *jāhili* (i.e. non-Islamic) oppression.⁴⁴

The emergence of these narratives dealing with pre-Islamic Arabian history, like the theme of *fitna*, took place in the context of rivalries within the early Islamic community—in this case, rivalries for political power and influence that were expressed along tribal and kinship lines. Many doubtless emerged during the intense struggles between different tribal and kinship groups that took place especially during the middle

⁴⁰Note especially the many works by Abū l-Yaẓqān on Tamīm and Khindif, cited in Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 94; trans. Dodge, 204.

⁴¹The most recent, and trenchant, analysis of this tribal rivalry is Crone, "Were the Qays and Yemen of the Umayyad Period Political Parties?"

⁴²For example, the apocalyptic anticipations of the Qaḥṭānī deliverer, noted above, 186 and n. 4.

⁴³See, for example, several accounts in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 1134–39, or many in al-Azraqī, *Kitāb akhbār Makka*.

⁴⁴See *El* 2, "Dhū Kār" (L. Vecchia Vaglieri) for the most celebrated case; e.g. the *ḥadīth* quoted in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 1016; also Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, 829 (no. 1511).

and later Umayyad period, i.e. during the first half of the second century AH.

Pre-Islamic Iran⁴⁵

Another theme that is prominent in many compilations of the third century AH and later deals with the history of pre-Islamic Iran and some other "eastern" empires (e.g. Assyria); as already noted,⁴⁶ Greek and Roman history received far less emphasis. The accounts about the Iranian kings, on the other hand, are quite numerous. The imbalance cannot have been for lack of available knowledge, for Greek and Syriac (and eventually Christian Arabic) ecclesiastical and secular histories containing much information on Greek and Roman history continued to circulate among the Christians of the Near East for centuries after the Islamic conquest. These would seem to have been more readily accessible to Muslims than the apparently sparse Iranian historical writings (in Pahlavi), which may have been limited to the official Sasanian annals or "Book of Kings." One would have expected the imbalance, in fact, to be reversed—fuller information on Greece and Rome than on Iran. Yet it was not so. Noth has observed that accounts on Byzantine history in Islamic sources are usually merely pastiches of stereotyped motifs and themes of Islamic historiography, whereas accounts about the Sasanians appear to contain real information and cannot be seen as efforts to invent information along lines of familiar themes.⁴⁷ This vouches for the authenticity of this information about the Sasanians, in the sense that it came from old sources.

There were several factors that help explain why Iranian material became especially prominent in Islamic historiography of the third century AH and later. One was a desire on the part of the Umayyads and 'Abbāsids to benefit from the administrative experience and practices of earlier empires, particularly the Sasanians.⁴⁸ A second was the desire to link the caliphate with the old Iranian concept of sacral, universal kingship. Some evidence suggests that the later Umayyads had already made efforts to adopt some of the symbols of power used by

⁴⁵Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 39–40; Noth/Conrad, 39.

⁴⁶See above, 128 (on al-Ṭabarī), 134 (on al-Ya'qūbī).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Latham, "The Beginning of Arabic Prose Literature," 155.

Sasanian kings to enhance the authority of their rule;⁴⁹ the 'Abbāsids, surrounded by avid supporters of the Iranian heritage, doubtless felt even more acutely the appeal—indeed, the necessity—of embracing the Iranian concept of kingship. (The *futūḥ* theme, of course, helped undermine any thought of a Sasanian restoration.)

Another possible motive for the increased interest in pre-Islamic Iran in early Islamic historical writing was the rise of the Shu'ūbiya movement, which emphasized the equality of non-Arabs with Arabs, if not the superiority of non-Arabs, particularly in cultural matters.⁵⁰ This claim was not limited to Iranians, of course, but Iranians played the dominant role in the Shu'ūbiya movement. Iranians with Shu'ūbī inclinations were prominent in the 'Abbāsīd government and in cultured society in Iraq and Iran after 132/750—indeed, bureaucrats from ministers to scribes seem to have formed a major component of the class of patrons who supported high culture. For this reason, it is not surprising that literary works, including historical ones, from the later second and third centuries AH should show some interest in the glories of the Iranian heritage. The first books dealing with the history of pre-Islamic Iran of which any record has survived dates from the early 'Abbāsīd period: the various translations by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. ca. 140/757) of Pahlavi works, including the *Book of Kings* (*Khwadāy-nāmag*), devoted to Sasanian historical traditions, and the *Ā'in-nāmag* on Sasanian institutions, and his *Kitāb al-tāj fī sīrat Anūshirwān*.⁵¹ A half-century later, Ābān al-Lāhiqī (d. 200/815) wrote biographies of the Sasanian kings Ardashīr and Khusrau Anūshirwān.⁵²

⁴⁹See, for example, Ettinghausen, *From Byzantium to Sasanian Iran and the Islamic World*, on Sasanian royal symbolism in Hishām's palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar; Grabar, "The Umayyad Dome of Rock in Jerusalem," 46–52.

⁵⁰The classic essays on the Shu'ūbiya movement are Chapters 4 and 5 in Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (= *Muslim Studies*, 137–98), but an extensive literature has arisen since. For an orientation, see *EI* ², "Shu'ūbiya" (S. Enderwitz), with bibliography.

⁵¹*EI* ², "Ibn al-Muqaffa'" (F. Gabrieli); Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 118; trans. Dodge, 260. On these works see Yarshater, ed., *Cambridge History of Iran*, 3: *The Seleucid, Parthian, and Sasanian Periods*, index; also the brief overview in Klīma, "Wie sah die persische Geschichtsschreibung in der vorislamischen Periode aus?"

⁵²*GAS*, I, 310; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 119; trans. Dodge, 260.

It may be that the interest in pre-Islamic Iran that we see reflected in both the Shu'ūbiya movement and in the historiographical tradition indirectly helped to generate another secondary historiographical theme, that of *ridda*, to which we now turn.

Ridda⁵³

The term *ridda* (lit. "going back," hence "apostasy") is used in the developed Islamic historiography of the third century AH and later to mean the rebellion of Arab tribes against Medina following the Prophet's death in 11/632. Accounts on this theme (often merged imperceptibly with those on *futūḥ*, as the events themselves seem to have been) are prominent in the later compilations. Yet it is not clear when this concept of *ridda* actually arose as a separate historiographical category, distinct from *futūḥ*. Information on battles that came to be viewed as part of the *ridda* were probably at first conveyed as part of the *futūḥ* theme, and only later was the *ridda* separated from the rest of *futūḥ* as a distinct theme.⁵⁴

Given the *ridda* theme's similarity with the *futūḥ* theme—the focus on martial activities, its nature as an early chapter in the unfolding saga of the Islamic community's expansion and its struggle against non-Muslim opponents—it is fair to assume that the raw material out of which the *ridda* theme was fashioned was similar to that on which the *futūḥ* theme was based: oral traditions of martial valor in the manner of the old *ayyām* tales, poems, songs, and personal and family memories. Indeed, the close relationship between the *futūḥ* and *ridda* themes is evident in the fact that many early works (and some later compilations as well) combine the information of these two themes in one work. The lost *maghāzī* work of al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, if it existed, evidently combined *maghāzī* ("raids," a similar martial theme) with history of the first three caliphs and the battle of the Camel—all martial in tone. Ibn Ishāq's lost *Kitāb al-futūḥ* probably included information on the *ridda* as well, to judge from Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī's *Kitāb al-futūḥ*, which appears to have been partly based on it.

⁵³Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 30–32; Noth/Conrad, 28–30. Noth considers *ridda* a primary, not a secondary theme.

⁵⁴Pace Noth, who considers *ridda* and *futūḥ* as distinct primary themes. For a justification of the view presented here, see below, 201–202.

Yet there are some notable differences between the two themes, and it is for this reason that they must, ultimately, be seen as separate themes. For one thing, concern for the *ridda* as a distinct theme of Islamic historical writing appeared considerably later than the *futūḥ* theme, at least to judge from the first identifiable titles containing the word *ridda*. The first monograph on the *ridda* of which we know is that of *Abū Mikhnaf* (d. 157/774), and it is only in the late second century that others begin to appear: the *Kitāb al-futūḥ wa-l-ridda* of *Sayf ibn 'Umar* (d. ca. 190/806), *Ibn al-Kalbī's* (d. 204/819) monograph on *Musaylima al-Kadhdhāb wa-Sajāḥ*, and the *Kitāb al-ridda* of *Abū Hudhayfa* (d. 206/821). Interest in the *futūḥ* theme, on the other hand, seems to have arisen as early as the late first and early second century AH, as we have seen—fully a century before the *ridda* theme is evident.

This difference in dating for the emergence of the two themes as foci of concern is probably related to the differing motivations behind them. Accounts about the *ridda* could have been generated for most of the reasons that led to the collection of accounts on the *futūḥ* theme (and indeed were, which is why such accounts were at first fused in many compilations): justification of Muslim rule over non-Muslims, stressing pride in participation by individuals or groups in early battles, etc. But in addition, the *ridda* theme emphasized that not all Arabians—only some—had backed Islam in its earliest days. The articulation of the *ridda* theme as distinct from *futūḥ* theme, then, probably represents an aspect of the debate over status and legitimacy within the community of Arabian Muslims. Like the juristic debate over whether only Quraysh can hold the caliphate, it is rooted in concern over Quraysh's domination of other Arab tribes, a concern that emerged in the first and second centuries and was generally dealt with in strictly genealogical terms: Quraysh as kinsmen of the Prophet had more "right" to rule than others—more than other Arabs as well as more than non-Arabs. The *Shu'ūbiya* movement and emergence of the theme of pre-Islamic Iran, however, which as we have seen was basically concerned with the question of Arabian vs. Persian identity, may have helped to create a stronger sense of solidarity among all Arabians—an identity associated with the Arabians' status as the first Muslims, the people of the Prophet, and the people in whose language the Qur'ān had been revealed. We can speculate that this heightened sense of "pan-Arabian"

identity may have caused the Quraysh to search for another way to differentiate themselves from other Arabians so as to bolster their position as politically, economically, and socially superior to other Arabs. In addition to genealogy, historiography could do this through the *ridda* theme, and it could do so in a way that was firmly tied to the story of Islamic origins itself.

CHAPTER 9

AUTHENTICITY, TRANSFORMATION, AND SELECTON OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL THEMES

The Narrative Tradition: Themes, Continuities, and Authenticity

Our survey in the preceding chapters of the narrative themes of early Islamic historiography has shown that most of them seem to have first emerged in written form only around the end of the first century AH or later. This raises in acute form the question of continuity and historical accuracy. If, as argued here, the earliest Believers were not concerned with history, and if the first indisputable evidence of an historicizing outlook only appears almost three-quarters of a century or more into the Islamic era, can we expect the early Muslims to have preserved *any* accurate information about Islamic origins? How could they have done so, if they did not (or did not yet) partake of an historicizing mentality? How could accurate information about Islamic origins be conveyed across what one scholar has called the “gap” in transmission about early Islam,¹ to serve as evidence for the first Islamic historians of the latter first century? Can modern historians, in fact, reconstruct with any certainty the events of Islamic origins from the surviving narratives about it, or are these accounts merely later inventions fabricated

¹Paret, “Die Lücke in der Überlieferung über den Islam.”

in the late first and early second centuries AH to fit the demands of the emerging historiographical themes?²

These questions are valid ones, but they are partly based on a misunderstanding. We must distinguish between *information about the past*, on the one hand, and, on the other, *narrative or historiographical themes*, which are intellectual categories employed to organize information about the past into meaningful complexes—into historical narratives. It is, of course, true that without historiographical themes, there can be no writing of history properly speaking, only assorted (and disorganized) trivia about the past. When we speak of a tradition of historical writing, what we mean is in fact a slowly evolving continuum of such organizing themes: in the case of the tradition of narratives of Islamic origins, as we have seen, this means the development of the themes of *nubūwa*, *futūh*, etc., that are its focal components, and which articulate central aspects of the Islamic community's self-conception. Yet it is important to recognize that information about the past can exist and can be passed on through time even in the absence of such themes.

Information about the past can be conveyed over time, even without historiographical themes, in several ways.

1. The most obvious and widespread, perhaps, but also the most fragile, is as *individual memories* of eyewitnesses to events. Their main limitation is that of time itself, since with the passage of more than four or five decades most eyewitnesses to an event would have died;³ a secondary limitation is imposed by the number of people who witnessed the events in the first place. In the case of Islamic origins, the number of people who personally witnessed Muḥammad's early life and early prophetic activity in Mecca was fairly limited (mainly only his fellow-tribesmen of Quraysh), and we can expect few of these eyewitnesses to have survived beyond about 50 AH. The number of people who might remember the Prophet's activity in Medina was somewhat greater (not only many Qurashīs and Medinese, but people from some other west

²In Crone's memorable formulation (*Slaves on Horses*, 7), are they merely "secondary structures stuffed with masses of legal and doctrinal *ḥadīths*"?

³Assuming that eyewitnesses needed to be at least fifteen years old to fully comprehend the events they saw, and assuming that few people lived beyond the age of sixty.

Arabian tribes and towns as well), although few can be expected to have survived beyond about 60 AH. On the other hand, some of the many people who witnessed the conquests could well have lived until 70 or 80 AH, and eyewitnesses to the events of the First Civil War—again, a fairly numerous group—could have lived well into the 80s AH. Because our evidence suggests that the narrative themes had begun to crystallize by the last quarter of the first century AH, there was ample opportunity for early “historians”—those members of the community who first intentionally collected accounts about the events of Islam’s origins—to have gathered eyewitness material on the conquests and on the First Civil War (and, of course, on subsequent events in the history of the community);⁴ eyewitnesses of the Prophet’s career in Medina were probably quite scarce, on the other hand, and those who remembered his activities in Mecca virtually non-existent. This rough timetable dovetails fairly well with the character of the surviving narratives, which display increasingly legendary features as we work our way back in time to the Prophet’s earliest years; for where reliable information about the past was lacking, fictional material was sure to meet the demand for information created by the developing narrative themes.⁵

Of course, the strict limitations imposed by time on the communication of eyewitness reports may be transcended if we assume that eyewitnesses related their memories of an event to someone else—say, to younger family members. This brings us to the question of *oral tradition*, a phenomenon that was without question very important in the transmission of narratives of Islamic origins; but because oral tra-

⁴For an example of a *futūḥ* account that may go back to the recollections of participants, see al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 126 (= Hitti, 194 top) on the conquest of the Syrian littoral, an account transmitted by Saʿīd ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Tanūkhī from al-Waḍīn ibn ʿAṭāʾ. On al-Waḍīn (d. 147 or 149), see Donner, “The Problem of Early Islamic Historiography in Syria,” 12–15. See also *ibid.*, 9–12, on accounts conveyed by ʿUḇāda ibn Nuṣayy (d. 118). The clustering of accounts collected by Waḍīn and ʿUḇāda shows clearly that the *futūḥ* theme had crystallized by their day.

⁵On this problem, see the discussion of “historicization” below, 209–14. Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia*, 78, makes a distinction between accounts of the life of Muḥammad before the *hijra* and those after it, arguing that the pre-*hijra* accounts are largely hagiography intended to fit Muḥammad into the models of earlier holy men. See also Fahd, “Problèmes de typologie dan la ‘Sira’ d’Ibn Iṣḥāq,” 69.

dition is a phenomenon that operates within certain constraints of its own, we must examine more closely how it may have worked in this context.

People cultivate and hand on stories, poems, proverbs, genealogies, etc., because they deem them in some way significant. This means that oral tradition, like written history, is an intentional attempt to establish or create meaning; it is not just a body of material conveyed "out of curiosity" or "by accident." For this reason, we cannot blithely assume that oral tradition can serve as a kind of oral repository of explicit historical information about themes that only emerge later; rather, oral tradition on a particular theme may more plausibly be seen, in literate cultures at least, as the initial manifestation of the community's concern for that theme, and hence as the precursor or first step toward literary fixation, the emergence of true historical writing on that theme. If a community has not identified a certain narrative theme as meaningful, then, it will not cultivate oral traditions about that theme any more than it will write history about it. (In the Islamic case, we may consider the collection of accounts about *nubūwa* or some other theme by an early transmitter such as al-Zuhrī or Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab, for example, as the moment of transition from a purely oral phase of transmission to literary fixation as history.) This observation means that if oral tradition is to convey information relevant to a certain narrative (historical) theme *before* the community's identification of that theme as significant, *it can only be as incidental information embedded in oral traditions whose main concern is something else.*

With regard to narratives of Islamic origins, two particular cases arise, which constitute the second and third ways information about the past was conveyed in the absence of historiographical themes.

2. Information about the past can be conveyed across time, even if no true historiographical themes are available to organize it, as raw material in other (i.e. non-historical) categories of perception and legitimation—for example moral, genealogical, lexicographical, etc. For even communities that feel no need for historical legitimation must have recourse to some kind of legitimizing principles. Such information is not yet history, properly speaking, but only the raw material out of which history may, someday, be made by weaving it into a meaningful narrative. With the emergence of narrative themes, this incidental informa-

tion about the past is reorganized to become part of the community's narrative history.

The following short poem, for example, uttered by Abū Miḥjan al-Thaqafī, describes the raid by Mālīk ibn 'Awf al-Naṣrī, the leader of the Hawāzin tribe, on the Thaqafīs at Ḥunayn. In itself, it belongs primarily in the category of tribal boasting:⁶

Enemies have always dreaded our neighborhood,
And now the Banū Salima raid us!
Mālīk brought them on us
Breaking his covenant and solemn word.
They attacked us in our settlements
And we have always been men who take revenge.

Although the poem expresses primarily the concerns of Arabian tribesmen who must establish their standing in relation to other tribes, it preserves the names of some of the groups involved in the battle of Ḥunayn, which, with time, came to be remembered and celebrated as one of the milestones in the Prophet Muḥammad's military career and in the coalescence of the early community of Believers.⁷

3. The second way in which oral tradition can convey information about the past in the absence of a given historiographical theme is as material embedded in narrative or historical accounts unrelated to that theme. For example, a family may cultivate stories about its own history; these stories may contain information that proves useful, at a later time, to an incipient religious or political community of which that family becomes a part.⁸ The "family" account can then be taken up by the crystallizing historical compilations of the nascent community.⁹

⁶Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 879; trans. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 594. For another example, see Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 447 (= Guillaume, 302).

⁷Another instance is analyzed in Caskel, "Aus der Frühzeit des Islam," where a poem relating to the battle of Mu'ta (8/629), initially preserved in a family tradition, is later relocated in the context of the *fitna* theme as part of a description of one of Mu'āwiya's raiding parties on Iraq during the First Civil War.

⁸See above, 140–41.

⁹Some examples are found in accounts of the illness and death of Abū Bakr, related by his relatives: e.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2128, with a multiple *isnād*, including one chain extending from al-Zuhrī via 'Urwa to 'Ā'isha, Abū Bakr's daughter,

Similarly, tales of martial valor in the tradition of the *ayyām al-‘arab*, which were really exercises in tribal legitimation, affirming the glory of one's clan, sometimes conveyed information that could prove useful for subsequent collectors of oral traditions interested in the themes *umma*, *futūḥ*, etc. Accounts of this kind, with a fairly clear tribal and weak Islamic focus, are sometimes encountered in the *futūḥ* narratives;¹⁰ in many other cases, accounts of this kind appear to have been part of the raw material from which extant accounts with an explicitly Islamic focus were composed.¹¹

4. Beside the reliance on individual memories and on oral tradition, information about the past can be conveyed through the survival of information on durable artifacts such as coins, inscriptions, architectural monuments, etc. These clearly could be produced before a community began to articulate a coherent self-conception; but generally, such durable documents are only rarely called upon for the creation of a narrative tradition of historicizing legitimation.¹²

and another stretching back to his great-grandson, Ṭaḥa ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr.

¹⁰E.g. *Ibid.*, I, 2420–21 (al-Sarī ← Shu‘ayb ← Sayf ← al-Naḍr ibn al-Sarī ← Ibn al-Rufayl ← his father), a Tamīmī tradition in which the heroics of Zuhra ibn Ḥawīya at the (supposed) battle of Burs are related. Cf. the continuation at I, 2422, where another Tamīmī, Abū Nubāta Nā’il ibn Ju’sham al-A’rajī, is the hero at “Bābil.”

¹¹E.g. *ibid.*, I, 2631–32 (al-Sarī ← Shu‘ayb ← Sayf ← Abū Ma’bad al-‘Absī and ‘Urwa ibn al-Walīd ← someone from their tribe), on the heroism of the ‘Abs leader Simāk ibn ‘Ubayd at Nihāwand. The treaty information may represent a secondary reworking of the original account; see above, 180.

¹²There is little indication in the classical Islamic narrative tradition of any use of durable documents, even, for instance, of ones as important as the inscriptions on major early monuments. To the best of my knowledge, no narrative source quotes or otherwise uses as evidence the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, the Prophet's mosque in Medina, or the mosques of al-Kūfa, Damascus, etc. For a rare exception, see al-Azdī, *Ta’rikh al-Mawṣil*, 248, where he quotes an inscription of al-Mahdī from AH 167. (I am grateful to Dr. Chase F. Robinson of Oxford University for locating this reference.) Another interesting example is found in Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, I, 60, where he cites evidence from a coin of AH 146 in discussing the governorship of Aleppo. Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ṭabaqāt*, 318, verifies accounts to the effect that Ṣafwān ibn al-Mu’aṭṭal died in Sumaysāt by reporting that the tomb of Ṣafwān is in the district of Sumaysāt and is a well-known and frequently visited place. Some addi-

5. Perishable records, of whatever origin, can also convey information about the past, but they were also rarely used by the Islamic historiographical tradition, assuming that they were even preserved;¹³ a rare example is the so-called "Constitution of Medina," on the antiquity and authenticity of which virtually all observers, from the most credulous to the most skeptical, seem to agree.¹⁴ Indeed, the very act of consciously setting documents aside and preserving them for posterity itself suggests that those engaged in doing so felt them to be in some way significant, implying that they were already thinking in terms of historiographical themes of some kind. It seems likely that truly documentary information (whether durable or perishable) is called upon only when an historiographical theme or tradition has begun to crystallize, after which such material may even be intentionally sought out and integrated into it.¹⁵ We can speculate that an emerging interest in the theme of administration, for example, may have led people to consult surviving records that may have been preserved in Medina, Damascus, and elsewhere.

The Narrative Tradition: Historicization and Hybridization

The formation of narrative themes meant, of course, not only that available authentic information about the past was collected and organized according to these themes, but also that spurious, legendary, and non-historical material could be placed in the context of these themes—a process we shall term HISTORICIZATION.¹⁶

Many accounts include historicized anecdotes; as an example, we may refer to an episode in which the Persian king Yazdagird, intend-

tional examples are noted in Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 121–28.

¹³On this possibility, see Bravmann, "The State Archives in the Early Islamic Era."

¹⁴For an orientation on it see Humphreys, "The Constitution of Medina," in his *Islamic History*, 92–98, with references to earlier studies.

¹⁵This, of course, is what modern historians do. See al-Azdī, *Ta'rikh al-Mawṣil*, 171–72, for an instance where he carefully scrutinizes a document for authenticity before quoting it.

¹⁶This includes identifying a presumed *sabab* or occasion for the revelation of a particular Qur'ānic verse or passage; on the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature, see above, 152.

ing an insult, makes one of the Muslim emissaries who have come to summon him to Islam carry out a clod of earth—an action taken by the Muslims as a good omen portending that the land of Iraq would change hands. Although this almost certainly never happened, it was, as a story with a symbolic point about hegemony, too good to pass up; to make it plausible, the storytellers placed it in the context of the Muslims' confrontation with the Sasanians at al-Qādisiyya.¹⁷

The historicization of spurious or legendary material raises what we may term the principle of VERISIMILITUDE IN COUNTERFEITING. By this we simply mean the fact that every counterfeit item, in order to succeed in its deceptive purpose, *must resemble a real article in certain recognizable ways*. A counterfeit silver coin, for example, will contain lead or other base metals instead of silver, but will be made to conform as closely as possible in other respects (size, design, weight, etc.) to some recognized coin issue, because its objective is to pass undetected as a coin of that issue. As an historical document, the counterfeit coin is obviously worthless for the study of the silver content of the coin issue it mimics, but it could be used to secure information on the mints, dates, iconography, and some other features of the official coin issue, even if no actual examples of the latter survived.¹⁸

The principle of verisimilitude in counterfeiting also applies to the historicization of legendary narrative accounts. Like counterfeit coins, which must closely resemble some actual coin issue, spurious "historical" accounts, to be plausible, must conform closely to prevailing assumptions about the history of the time they address that were generally accepted at the time they were fabricated—that is, to what was "known" about that history. While such assumptions are not the same as historical "reality," they do represent the attitude of people a gen-

¹⁷Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 2239–45 (Sayf ← 'Amr ← al-Sha'bī). A few other examples: *ibid.*, I, 2437–38, an improbable story of a cup lost, and refound through miraculous luck, at the siege of al-Madā'in; *ibid.*, I, 2438, underwater hillocks in the Tigris support the Muslim soldiers crossing to al-Madā'in; *ibid.*, I, 1965–68, a miraculous pool of water saves the Muslim army crossing the desert during the *ridda* wars; *ibid.*, I, 1585, on the Prophet giving instructions on making up missed prayers.

¹⁸This point seems to have been suggested already by Bräunlich in his review of Lammens's *La Mecque*.

eration closer to the actual events, and do impose limits within which the counterfeiter must operate.

As an example, let us consider again the report about Yazdagird and the Muslim envoys mentioned above. As noted, this report is probably a fabrication manufactured long after the conquests to provide a good dramatic story confirming the idea that the Islamic conquests were part of God's plan.¹⁹ As such it cannot be considered valid contemporary evidence about the conquests; yet we may be able to deduce from it that Muslims of the late first century AH, if not earlier, already took for granted that there had been a decisive battle during the conquests at a place called al-Qādisiyya, and that Rustam and al-Mughīra were two prominent participants in it on the Persian and Muslim sides. The fact that al-Qādisiyya was seen as a realistic grafting place for spurious accounts, in other words, tells us that we must include it in the earliest stratum of the Islamic community's historical recollections.

Another example illustrates the historicization of a legal principle. In two accounts related by al-Balādhurī, Fāṭima asks Abū Bakr to hand over to her the north Arabian oasis of Fadak. When he demands that she provide proof that the Prophet had, in fact, bequeathed Fadak to her, she brings two witnesses, a man and a woman, to substantiate her claim. Abū Bakr, however, observes that this is a matter that can be decided only by a man and two women (or by two men) as witnesses.²⁰ Readers familiar with Islamic law will immediately recognize that the real issue underlying these accounts was the value of a woman's testimony as witness, but the principle being debated (that a woman's testimony was weighted half that of a man) is placed in the context of the known dispute over Fadak. It is noteworthy that in other accounts

¹⁹The account may also have had the additional objective of affirming the genealogical superiority of the 'Amr clan of Tamīm, whose representative in the tale, 'Aṣim ibn 'Amr, is identified as the "most noble" of the group of envoys and the one to whom Yazdagird gives the earth to carry, intending to humble him. The envoys from the Usayyid clan of Tamīm and the tribe of Muzayna, who are named in the account, are made to recognize 'Aṣim ibn 'Amr as the most noble among them.

²⁰Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 30–31 (*isnāds*: [a] 'Abd Allāh ibn Maymūn al-Mukattib ← al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyād ← Mālik ibn Ja'wana ← his father; [b] Rawḥ al-Karabīsī ← Zayd ibn al-Ḥubāb ← Khālīd ibn Ṭahmān ← a man Rawḥ thinks was Ja'far ibn Muḥammad).

about this dispute the question of witnesses does not arise;²¹ moreover, the accounts related by al-Balādhurī are conveyed on the authority of transmitters who are not otherwise cited as sources in the more historical Fadak accounts.

Historicization is a common feature of many *ḥadīths*, as well as of many accounts of the *umma*, *nubūwa*, *futūḥ*, and other themes dealing with the earliest events of the community of Believers.²² The widespread use of historicization to situate various kinds of material—legal, exegetical, moral/didactic, etc.—within the narratives of Islamic origins requires that the researcher be very wary about assuming the “historical truth” of a particular episode or detail, and demands that we be able to identify, as much as possible, the tendencies or motivations underlying such historicizations, in order to set them aside as historical evidence. There is a brighter side to this, however; by tabulating the features used as the “framing” of early historicized accounts we can assemble a basic list of events that, because everyone accepted them as truly historical, we must also assume to have happened—even if it is sometimes difficult to say just what happened at them. This may be as deep in the narrative tradition as we can delve, what we might call the historical bedrock of the narratives of Islamic origins.²³

The process of historicization also contributed to what we can call the “hybridization” of narrative themes. While the motivations that lay behind any one narrative theme usually found expression in material directly relating to that theme, there also occur hybrid or crossover accounts, in which the issues of more than one theme are combined.

²¹Cf. the account in al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 472–74 (no. 9774: al-Zuhri ← ‘Urwa ← ‘Ā’isha).

²²It is also the basis underlying the creation of many popular epics in Arabic-Islamic literature. See, for example, Paret, *Die legendäre Maghāzī-Literatur*; *idem*, “Die legendäre Futūḥ-Literatur,” Heath, *The Thirsty Sword*.

²³The assembly of a comprehensive list of such “framing” events would seem to be an important desideratum of further research in early Islamic history. For example, a cursory overview of the many essentially pietistic *akḥbār* in Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-jihād*, reveals, among others, the following “frame” events: Badr, Uḥud, Biʾr Maʿūna, al-Aḥzāb (Trench), Tabūk, Ḥunayn, Muʿta, election of Abū Bakr, al-Jisr, al-Yarmūk, al-Qādisiyya, Iṣfahān, raids on Byzantium, raids on the sea, etc. E.g. no. 219, an excellent example of a superficial historicization set in the context of the Prophet’s siege of al-Ṭāʾif.

That is, once given historiographical or narrative themes had begun to crystallize within the community, many accounts could be grafted into the contexts provided by those themes, even if the motivations for the particular accounts had nothing to do with the reasons for the rise of the theme involved. For example, we saw above that struggles over leadership among contending claimants for the caliphate contributed to the rise of the *fitna* theme. Not infrequently, however, we encounter accounts addressing this issue that are situated within the events of an entirely different narrative theme. Perhaps the most common case involves accounts in the biography of the Prophet comparing the actions of 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and al-'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Although these are placed in the context of accounts normally belonging to the themes of *nubūwa* or *umma*, in fact they belong to the theme of *fitna*, since the purpose of most such accounts is to provide support for the legitimacy of one over the other, rather than actually to relate something about the life of the Prophet.²⁴ Other combinations, such as accounts dealing with issues of *fitna* placed in the context of the *futūḥ* or conquests, are also found. For example, according to one account the caliph 'Umar was about to leave Medina for al-Jābiya in Syria during the conquests. He instructed 'Alī to serve as his deputy in Medina during his absence. 'Alī urged him not to leave Medina, but 'Umar replied: "I'm going to fight the enemy before the death of al-'Abbās. If you lose al-'Abbās, evil will unravel you like the ends of a rope." The caliph's words betray the account's real purpose as a contribution to the debate over *fitna* (significantly, they are delivered to 'Alī), even though the superficial context of the account is that of *futūḥ*.²⁵

²⁴An example is the cluster of accounts about the death of 'Alī's father Abū Ṭālib, the purveyors of which almost without exception appear to have had their eye mainly on the later political rivalry of the 'Alids and 'Abbāsids. On these see Donner, "The Death of Abū Ṭālib." The way issues of *fitna* could affect reports ostensibly on the theme of *umma* or *nubūwa* is obvious in an account related by Ma'mar ibn Rashid: "I asked al-Zuhrī: 'Who wrote the treaty document (*kitāb*) on the day of al-Ḥudaybiya?' He laughed and said: 'It was 'Alī, but if you asked those (meaning the Umayyads), they would say: "Uthmān [wrote it]."' " See Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Kitāb faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*, no. 1002 (← 'Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma'mar).

²⁵Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2404-2405 (← 'Adī ibn Sahl). Another case: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2349-50 (← Ibn Ishāq): an anti-Umayyad, pro-Zubayrid account placed in the context of the battle of Yarmūk.

We should note, in the context of hybridization and historicization, that the historiographical tradition also included embedded in it exercises in other forms of legitimation (moral/pious, genealogical, theocratic) that were, in some measure, historicized. Most common, perhaps, are accounts of an apparently historical character that really aim to make a point about moral legitimation. The accounts described in the preceding chapter that attempt to use historicization to resolve the dilemma, in moral terms, posed by the figure of the figure of the third caliph, ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, are a case in point; the episode of ‘Uthmān’s loss of the Prophet’s signet ring really represents hybrid of moral legitimation and historicizing legitimation.²⁶

Before concluding, we should remind ourselves that the historiographical themes described in the previous chapters do not represent the only kinds of material about the past that were in circulation in the Islamic community. Rather, they represent the kinds of material that proved to be of particular interest to many later compilers, and so survived thanks to their inclusion in the later texts (notably the chronicles of the third century AH and later). In principle, it is possible that material of almost any kind could have been remembered and circulated by some in the nascent Muslim community; indeed, sufficient material about Islamic origins that does not conform to the themes sketched out above survive in a few later compilations to give us some idea of what some of these other concerns may have been. This brings us to the question of marginal themes and local historiographical schools, both of which represent cases in which material was deemed of interest and preserved only in a particular locality or by a few groups, and did not become part of the mainstream tradition of Islamic origins narratives.

Marginal Themes and Local Historiographical Schools

In addition to the themes discussed previously, which were taken up to provide the main contours of what we have termed the “canonical” narrative of Islamic origins embraced by all Muslims, we can notice in the surviving material from the early Islamic community (before *ca.* 150 AH) an interest in certain other themes that were not destined

²⁶On ‘Uthmān and the signet ring, see above, 192–93. See also the examples discussed above, 190–92.

to become so centrally important to the construction of the community's historical self-perception, and which, for that reason, we may call "marginal themes." In many cases, these marginal themes reflect a concern for the historical events of a particular locality, which because of their strictly local or regional interest, were not integrated into the broader narrative of Islamic origins. This raises, however, the question of the existence of local historiographical schools in the early community of Believers. This question also arises because, in our examination of various themes that make up the bulk of the "canonical" narrative of Islamic origins, we have tried, when possible, to offer a tentative identification of the historical setting in which each theme arose—including not only the factors and issues that generated the theme, but also the particular region or regions where each theme originated or was especially cultivated.

Long ago Wellhausen, in his analysis of reports on the conquest and Umayyad periods, put forth the theory that early Islamic historical writing was the product of two local schools of activity, one based in the Ḥijāz (mainly Medina) and the other based in Iraq (especially al-Kūfa).²⁷ In Wellhausen's view the accounts of Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī, who typified the approach of the Medina school, were relatively sober in tone, chronologically plausible, and less tainted by tribal or partisan biases, and hence were more reliable for use by the modern historian as evidence to reconstruct early Islamic history than were the accounts of the Iraqi school. The latter, typified by the reports of Sayf ibn 'Umar, frequently displayed serious shortcomings in chronology, reflected an idealized and overly centralized view of the early caliphate, and betrayed the impact of tribal chauvinism. Sayf in particular was castigated by Wellhausen as a mischievous storyteller and romanticizer whose accounts were to be rejected as misleading; some other Iraqi authorities, such as Abū Mikhnaf, were considered by Wellhausen to be somewhat more trustworthy as historical witnesses, but still were deemed by him more biased than were the authors of the Medina school. In fact, what Wellhausen did was to make a general evaluation of the accounts of a small number of major traditionists—Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī, Sayf ibn 'Umar, Abū Mikhnaf, 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam,

²⁷Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 4–7.

al-Madā'inī, etc.—who were among the main informants of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ*, the most important texts for early Islamic history available in Wellhausen's day. He then drew broader conclusions on the basis of two assumptions: first, that each of these authorities, although deriving material from earlier informants, shaped this material in accordance with his own tendencies and biases, and hence was primarily responsible for the overall character of the reports he conveyed; and second, that each of these authorities could be linked to a particular local "school," whose biases and tendencies he reflected. This approach gave Wellhausen a convenient tool for deciding which of several conflicting accounts he wished to follow in reconstructing "what actually happened."

Both of Wellhausen's general assumptions have been challenged in recent years. Noth argued convincingly that none of the so-called "schools," or the authors supposedly making them up, actually represented a distinct, unified ideological stance.²⁸ Historiographical activity in all centers, according to Noth, absorbed earlier accounts of the most diverse kinds, reflecting different political, theological, tribal, social, and cultural origins and perspectives. Moreover, each of the "schools" used the same methods of collection and transmission. Consequently, Noth concluded, they could not be differentiated as schools on either methodological or ideological grounds. More recently, Landau-Tasseron has pointed out that many of the apparent contradictions in the accounts of the much-maligned Sayf ibn 'Umar derive not from Sayf's accounts per se, but from Wellhausen's way of viewing them. The work of these and other scholars makes it clear that we cannot simply reject out of hand the accounts conveyed by any one informant, or originating in any particular place, but must evaluate each individual account on its own terms, in the context of other accounts on the subject.

Although the critiques of Wellhausen's "school" theory by Noth and others are valid, they tend to obscure the fact that historical writing during the first two Muslim centuries was, in fact, the product of a very limited number of major cities. (This feature it shared with many other aspects of Islamic "high culture," which were likewise produced

²⁸Noth, "Der Charakter der ersten großen Sammlungen;" *idem*, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 11–23; Noth/Conrad, 4–17.

mainly in large towns, because in the first century AH in particular it was only in the towns that large communities of Believers were to be found.) Although it is true that the early compilations made in each of these centers incorporated accounts of diverse transmitters and that they used methods akin to those used in other places, it is nonetheless plausible to assume that these early historians in each center had their own particular concerns as historians, differing to some degree from the concerns of historians in other centers, and that they imparted their own emphasis to the materials they collected by a process of selection.²⁹ That is, the “school” conception may have some relevance not for deciding the reliability of a given account or compiler, but for an understanding of the development of the different themes of early Islamic historiography. It is natural to assume, for example, that an historian of al-Kūfa, where popular sympathy for the cause of ‘Alī and his family was widespread, might convey more material of a pro-‘Alid character than historians attached to the Umayyad family, and certainly would be inclined to devote more space to relating events that took place in and around al-Kūfa, and to events of great importance to the local Shī‘ī community, even if his own opinions were not pro-‘Alid. More basic than the question of bias or tendency enshrined in particular accounts, in other words, is the question of the thematic focus that developed in each center. The issues that loomed large in the minds of scholars in one center, regardless of their particular partisan attitude on it (e.g. accounts about the first *fitna* in al-Kūfa), might be considered of relatively minor importance in another center (e.g. in Egypt), and vice versa. This idea has actually been hinted at by Duri, who in his study of early Arabic historiography made a loose distinction between an “Islamic line” of historians, most of whom were linked with Medina and who concentrated above all on themes relating to the life and history of the Prophet, and a “tribal line” of historians (*akhbārīyūn*), most of whom were linked with Iraq and who collected information mainly about “secular” events, such as the conquests and the role of various tribes there during the conquests and subsequently.

The question of local historiographical “schools” in places such as al-Kūfa and Medina thus needs to be reconsidered in light of the de-

²⁹This is noted in Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 22–23; Noth/Conrad, 17.

velopment of early historiographical themes.³⁰ We should note that al-Kūfa and Medina were not the only centers of historiographical activity in the first two centuries; as we shall see, considerable historical work was also done in Syria, Yemen, and Egypt, and, eventually, Baghdad. The products of the historians active in al-Kūfa and Medina, however, came to make up a disproportionately large part of the “canonical” origins narrative of the Islamic community that was enshrined in the compilations of the third and later centuries AH that are extant. The reasons for this imbalance seems to lie in political history of the caliphate during the first two centuries, and the ways in which the thematic concerns of scholars in different centers related to that history. This is best seen by examining briefly several of the early historiographical centers and their works, from which the geographical distribution of different themes in the first and early second centuries AH will become clearer. By the later second century, the regional focus of various themes was rapidly becoming lost; by that time, work on most of the themes that became central to the Islamic historiographical tradition was being done in all major centers of historiographical activity. That is, accounts on those themes had by the late second century AH circulated widely enough through travel of scholars (and books?) that the originally distinct themes began to be woven together to form the fabric of classical Islamic historiography.

Before turning to the main early schools, however, we must consider the difference between the local history of particular communities of Muslims, and “Islamic history” in a broader sense. In a way, any history written by Muslims about themselves could be called Islamic history. But the “canonical” narrative of Islamic origins that is enshrined in classical Islamic historiography of the third century AH and later is limited to historical events that trace the evolution of, and bolster the identity of, the Islamic community as a whole. Clearly much was written by Muslims that was not relevant to “Islamic history” in this sense, but was, rather, considered merely to be “local history.”

³⁰It is ironic that Noth did not consider this question in *Quellenkritische Studien*, inasmuch as he was the first scholar to analyze Islamic historical writings thematically.

MEDINA

Medina was an important early center of historiographical activity in the Islamic community. The rise of interest in the themes of *nubūwa* and *umma*—whether that interest was first sparked in Medina itself, or, as suggested above, owed much of its inspiration to the encouragement of the Umayyad regime³¹—resulted in the appearance in Medina of numerous pious and learned men who related traditions about the Prophet Muḥammad and his life. That this should have happened in Medina is, of course, not surprising, because it was the city where the Prophet had first established the community of Believers, and there that the greatest number of people lived who remembered the Prophet or had, in their youth, known people who remembered him.

At any rate, it is clear that from the last quarter of the first century AH numerous learned Medinese specialized in relating accounts about the Prophet, including such well-known figures as ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/713), Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94), ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ka‘b (d. 97/716), Ābān ibn ‘Uthmān (d. 100), al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr (d. 107), Muḥammad ibn Ka‘b ibn Sulaym al-Quraẓī (d. 118), ‘Āṣim ibn ‘Umar ibn Qatāda (d. 120), Shuraḥbīl ibn Sa‘d (d. 123), and the great Muḥammad ibn Muslim ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124), to name but a few.³² What is most striking about the list is that it includes virtually all of the early authorities (i.e. those before 150 AH) who are said to have compiled *sīra* or *maghāzī* works, that is, works dealing primarily with the themes of *nubūwa* and *umma*.³³ After the mid-second century AH, however, we find authors in the most diverse localities compiling *sīra* and *maghāzī* works. Clearly by that

³¹See above, 154, 166.

³²A rather extensive list can be quickly reconstructed by perusing *GAS*, I, 275–302. Whether these individuals all compiled discrete “books,” as Sezgin would have us believe, or only kept notes (or cultivated their memory) on this material, is for our purposes immaterial; on this point, see above, 145–46.

³³The only exceptions appear to be the early *maghāzī* works by the Kūfan al-Sha‘bī (d. 103), the Yemenite Wāḥib ibn Munabbih (d. 114; maybe all on *mubtada*?), the Kufan al-Sabī‘ī (d. 127), the Baṣran Abū l-Mu’tamir (d. 143), and Ma‘mar ibn Rāshid (d. 154), who resided in Yemen but had been trained in Medina in any case.

time, *sīra* and *maghāzī* material had succeeded in circulating far and wide—carried to distant regions by scholars who had gone to study with the masters of *maghāzī* in Medina (or Baghdad, where many leading scholars appear to have settled after the middle of the second century AH). In any case, this material on *sīra* and *maghāzī*, largely Medinese in origin, came to be an important theme of Islamic historiography in general.

Medina may have been also an early center for the collection of accounts belonging to the *futūḥ* theme. As we have seen, even such early Medinese figures as Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyab may have collected accounts on the conquests, and Ibn Ishāq compiled a book on the subject; Medinese informants may in particular have provided much of the material on the appointment of commanders and other aspects of the caliphs' management and organization of the conquests.³⁴ Some *futūḥ* accounts, moreover, may be hidden to us because they were incorporated into *maghāzī* compilations; the *Kitāb al-maghāzī* of Mūsā ibn 'Uqba (d. 141/758), for example, which may have relied at least in part on al-Zuhri's *maghāzī* work, appears to have contained some accounts on at least the early phases of the conquests.³⁵ Ibn Ishāq's book on *futūḥ* is the first with such a title by a Medinese author of which we know; unfortunately, he does not appear to have named his sources, for neither al-Ṭabarī's nor Ibn 'Asākir's excerpts from it carry the *isnād* farther back than Ibn Ishāq himself. However, Medinese material on *futūḥ* usually dealt not with the events on the battlefronts, but mainly with who was appointed by the early caliphs to command

³⁴Above, 180. The question of the degree to which the conquests were a centralized phenomenon is discussed in Donner, "Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy."

³⁵See the accounts in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid) I, 448; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1851. On Mūsā's *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, see the supposed fragment published in Sachau, "Das Berliner Fragment des Mūsā Ibn 'Uqba," and the skeptical comments on it by Schacht, "On Mūsā b. 'Uqba's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*." Schacht claims that 'Uqba's original text probably consisted entirely of reports from al-Zuhri; elsewhere, he claims that Mūsā's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* consists of a list (early?) of participants in various events of the Prophet's life, to which stories (later) reflecting political, family and personal interests were added (in his review of Rosenthal's *History of Muslim Historiography*, 154).

various forces³⁶—hardly surprising, since it is just this kind of information that we would expect the Medinese to be able to provide, at least for those caliphs who had resided in Medina.

Medina was also an important source of material on the *fitna* theme, especially for those episodes in the First and Second Civil Wars that actually took place there, or nearby: the murder of ‘Uthmān, the rule of Ibn al-Zubayr, the battle of the Ḥarra, and the like. As we have seen, Medinese informants were also able to provide material on some questions of early administration, and on the themes of *khilāfa* (e.g. al-Zuhri’s *Asnān al-khulafā’*) and *sīrat al-khulafā’* (for example, much material in the *Ta’rikh al-Madīna al-Munawwara* of ‘Umar ibn Shabba).

All of those themes—*nubūwa*, *umma*, *futūḥ*, *fitna*, *khilāfa*, *sīrat al-khulafā’*—eventually became central to the early Islamic historiographical tradition. The later history of Medina—particularly after the death of Ibn al-Zubayr, and even to some extent after the death of ‘Uthmān—became essentially a subject of merely local interest, since the central concerns of the Islamic state were no longer focused there; it was never integrated into the main themes of Islamic historiography.

MECCA

Mecca, in contrast to Medina, developed accounts relating mainly to the theme of pre-Islamic Arabian history, particularly the pre-Islamic history of the Quraysh. But most of the extant material deals with the early history of the Ka‘ba and *ḥaram*, as well as details of the topography and rituals of the sacred area, and is only marginally historical. The earliest work entirely devoted to this seems to have been the *Akhhbār Makka* of al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823);³⁷ it has not survived, but it was an important source for al-Azraqī’s later work of the same title.³⁸ Material

³⁶See, for example, al-Zuhri’s accounts in al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 452–66 (no. 9770), 482–83 (no. 9777), 483 (no. 9778); also the accounts going back to Mūsā ibn ‘Uqba cited in the preceding note.

³⁷*GAS*, I, 345.

³⁸Al-Azraqī’s *Kitāb akhhbār Makka* was published as volume I of Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, *Chroniken der Stadt Mecca*.

on some episodes of Mecca's history, such as Abraham's construction of the Ka'ba or episodes involving the Prophet Muḥammad, found its way into the developing themes of *nubūwa* and Qur'ān-related narratives; but the majority of the material on Mecca's history, including almost all of it after the *hijra*, was ignored by the developing historiographical canon and has survived only as local history.

AL-KŪFA

Al-Kūfa was, like Medina, another early center of historiographical activity; yet, on the basis of book titles attributed to early Kūfan authors, it seems to have become active considerably later than Medina, and its authors devoted most of their attention to the themes of *fitna* (especially involving 'Alid opposition to the Umayyads, etc.), *futūḥ*, administration, and *sīrat al-khulafā'*. Foremost among the early Kūfan historians were 'Āmir al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) (who also collected material on the *umma* theme), al-Sabī'ī (d. 127/745), Jābir al-Ju'fī (d. 128/746), 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam (d. ca. 147/764), and, above all, Abū Mikhnaḥ (d. 157/774), author of numerous monographs on various aspects of these themes.

As noted above, much of this material—particularly that dealing with episodes in the struggle of the 'Alids against the Umayyads—could actually be considered local history, because it took place in or near al-Kūfa or involved mainly people from al-Kūfa (e.g. the battle of Nahrawān, the mutiny of Ḥujr ibn 'Adī, the Umayyad massacre of 'Alids at Karbalā', the uprising of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī 'Ubayd, etc.); yet these episodes became integrated into the mainstream of Islamic historiography, one key theme of which was *fitna*—the struggle for leadership of the community. The later history of al-Kūfa, on the other hand, aside from these struggles over leadership, is virtually unknown; no early book with the title "History of al-Kūfa" has been recorded.³⁹

³⁹The earliest one of which we have record is the *Ta'rikh al-Kūfa* of Muḥammad ibn Ja'far ibn al-Najjār (d. 402/1011). On him see *GAS*, I, 350.

AL-BAŞRA

Al-Başra, in contrast to al-Kūfa, appears to have contributed minimally to the main themes of early Islamic historiography. With the exception of the battle of the Camel during the First Civil War, none of the main episodes that came to make up the Islamic origins story took place in al-Başra; the town's history remained mostly of local interest, and was preserved locally, at least, in such later works as the *Akhbār ahl al-Başra* of 'Umar ibn Shabba (d. 264/877),⁴⁰ the *Ta'rikh al-Başra* of Zakarīyā' ibn Yaḥyā al-Başrī al-Sājī (d. 307/920),⁴¹ and a few of the compilations of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Madā'inī (d. ca. 235/850), such as his *Kitāb al-khawārij* and *Kitāb Zakan Iyās*, on an early *qāḍī* of al-Başra⁴²—all now lost. Generally speaking, few early Başrans figure in the *isnāds* of accounts belonging to the main historiographical themes. The existence of a few Başran *isnāds* in the theme of Qur'ān-related narratives, attached to accounts dealing with the life of Jesus and the early Christian community, suggest that some Başrans may have been instrumental in cultivating that theme.

YEMEN

Yemen (presumably especially its main town, Ṣan'ā') seems to have been a center of significant historiographical activity in the early Islamic period; as we have seen, it was an early center of interest in the themes of Qur'ān-related narratives (including *mubtada'* materials) and pre-Islamic Arabian history. The Yemeni *mubtada'* materials were integrated, in part at least, into the Islamic origins narratives as part of the story of the pre-Islamic prophets and of conditions in Arabia that set the stage for Muḥammad's prophetic activity there. As we have seen, they were elaborated especially by (the possible legendary) Ka'b ibn al-Aḥbār (d. 34), and by the main figures of early tradition and historiography in Yemen, Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114) and Ma'mar ibn

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 343.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I, 349–50.

⁴² *Ibid.*, I, 314–15.

Rāshid (d. 154).⁴³ The *mubtada'* materials of Wahb, for example, were an important source for the corresponding section of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra*.⁴⁴

The other theme of early Islamic historiography to which Yemeni informants contributed significantly is the theme of pre-Islamic Arabia, the background to which, as we have seen, was the rivalry between South Arabians and the Quraysh for political leadership. It is noteworthy that the first historical books in Arabic identified by Sezgin are works dealing with South Arabian history, culture, and kingship.⁴⁵ 'Abīd ibn Sharyā (d. 60) wrote a *Kitāb fī akhbār al-Yaman wa-ash'āruhā wa-ansābuhā*, "Reports of the Yemen and its Poetry and Genealogy," and Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 114) wrote a *Kitāb al-mulūk*; these works, which included popular stories and information about the pre-Islamic Ḥimyarite kings of Yemen, are more than just a reflection of "the early interest of Muslims in worldly history,"⁴⁶ they represent ammunition for the Yemeni side in the debate over whether the leadership of the community of Believers should be in the hands of South Arabians, some of whose chiefs claimed legitimacy on the basis of their long heritage of kingship in Yemen, and the Quraysh of Mecca, tribesmen of "North Arabian" origin who, by virtue of being of the Prophet Muḥammad's tribe, had found themselves near the center of power of the new community from an early date.

EGYPT

Egypt had, in the late first and second century AH, many active historians who seem to have concentrated on the history of this province

⁴³See above, 159, on Yemen. Sezgin (*ibid.*, I, 291) notes that Ma'mar's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* probably included much material on the theme of Qur'ān-related narratives (i.e. earlier prophets).

⁴⁴Ibn Hishām's recension of Ibn Ishāq only contains a few accounts traced to Wahb, but he has cut out most of the original *Mubtada'*. Ibn Ishāq's reliance on Wahb is more apparent when we consult Newby, *Making of the Last Prophet*, index s.v. "Wahb ibn Munabbih."

⁴⁵*GAS*, I, 244. This fact is significant even if we argue, *pace* Sezgin, that these "titles" represent only coherent foci of interest rather than defined written texts. Sezgin identifies 'Abīd's *Kitāb fī akhbār al-Yaman* and Wahb's *Kitāb al-mulūk*; we add the second title of 'Abīd's, which only seems to strengthen the case.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, I, 244.

itself.⁴⁷ We find, for example, mention of many books on the history of Egypt composed in the first half of the second century AH. These included the *Kitāb futūḥ Miṣr* by Abū Qabīl al-Ma'āfirī (d. 128/745) and works on the history of Egypt by Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb (d. 128/745), al-Ḥārith ibn Yazīd al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 130/747), 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ja'far al-Miṣrī (d. ca. 135/752), 'Amr ibn al-Ḥārith al-Anṣārī (a Medinese who settled in Egypt, d. 147/764), Yaḥyā ibn Ayyūb (d. 168/784), and 'Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a (d. 174/790).⁴⁸ All of these early works appear to be lost, but significant quotes from some survive in later works, notably the *Futūḥ Miṣr* of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871) and the works of Abū 'Umar al-Kindī (d. 360/971), from which we can gain some idea of what they were like. The surviving fragments suggest that early Egyptian historians were, among other things no doubt, quite interested in matters of administration and of settlement in Egypt (*khiṭaṭ*), an issue that is only weakly attested in other localities.⁴⁹

In no other region do the Believers/Muslims appear to have developed an interest in local history so early; local histories devoted to other regions and towns certainly did arise, and indeed became an important part of Islamic historiography, but only starting at the very end of the second/eighth century, and mainly in the third/ninth and, especially, later centuries, when, in many cases, their appearance parallels the rise of local dynasties in various regions following the breakup of the unified caliphate. When local histories do proliferate, they are frequently composed mainly of biographical entries on the scholars (*'ulamā'*) of the towns in question, and tell us little about the actual history of the town or region.⁵⁰

⁴⁷For basic information on many of them, see *ibid.*, I, 341–43, 354–60.

⁴⁸On Ibn Lahī'a, Egypt's leading early *ḥadīth* scholar, see *ibid.*, I, 94; also Khoury, *'Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a*.

⁴⁹Compare Iraq, for example: hardly anything, other than Sayf's few accounts, is provided on settlement patterns. Medina is somewhat better represented in 'Umar ibn Shabba's *Ta'riḫ al-Madīna al-Munawwara*.

⁵⁰This pattern continues into later times; consider, for example, the *Ta'riḫ Wāsiṭ* of Bahshal al-Wāsiṭī (d. 292/905), the *Ta'riḫ al-Raqqa* of Muḥammad ibn Sa'īd al-Qushayrī (d. 334/946), or even the massive *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1176), about eighteen of the nineteen large manuscript volumes of which are devoted to biographical entries.

Egypt's early development of an active local historiography at a time when it was still firmly under caliphal rule is, then, quite unique, perhaps explainable as a reflection of Egypt's apparently age-old sense of regional identity and distinctness as a place. Yet the history of Egypt from the time of the Islamic conquest was never integrated to a significant degree into the general historical compilations of the Islamic community in the third and subsequent centuries AH, and hence much of its substance has been lost. The failure of later compilers who constructed the "canonical" narrative of Islamic origins to draw on Egyptian material, despite its availability, says much about their motives in making that narrative. Presumably Egyptian historical tradition was slighted because later compilers did not deem it relevant to the larger story they wished to tell—the story of Islam's origins in Arabia, of the community's expansion, its division in civil wars, the struggle of the Hāshimites and others against Umayyad oppression, and the ultimate overthrow of the Umayyads by the 'Abbāsids. With the exception of the conquest of Egypt itself, none of the crucial episodes in this larger story took place in Egypt—and, as is sometimes the case, the exception here proves the rule: the conquest of Egypt is the one moment in Egyptian history after the rise of Islam to receive significant coverage in, for example, al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*, which thereafter mentions it only sporadically.

SYRIA

Syria, to judge from titles of early written books of which we know, was not the focus of specific local or regional histories until relatively late; the first ones recorded are the *Man nazala Filasṭīn min al-ṣaḥāba* of Mūsā ibn Sahl al-Ramlī (d. 261/874), on the Prophetic Companions who settled in Palestine, followed by a pair of histories of the main center of early Muslim settlement in Syria, Ḥimṣ, by Aḥmad ibn Mūsā ibn 'Īsā (d. late third/ninth century) and 'Abd al-Ṣamad ibn Sa'īd al-Ḥimṣī (d. 324/936).⁵¹

⁵¹On these figures, see *GAS*, I, 357.

Examination of particular accounts about the early history of Syria, however, shows that some Syrian scholars were interested in the history of the area, particularly the theme of *futūḥ*; for example, both Ṣafwān ibn 'Amr al-Saksakī (d. 100/718 or 108/726)⁵² and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Jubayr ibn Nufayr al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 118/736),⁵³ both of Ḥimṣ, related accounts on conquests in Syria.⁵⁴ However, either they did not write books specifically on Syria, or their titles have not been preserved.

The Umayyads, as we have seen, appear to have been instrumental in sponsoring the collection of historical accounts on a number of the main themes of early Islamic historiography, including *nubūwa*, *umma*, cult and administration, *khilāfa*, and *futūḥ*. In many cases, they appear to have patronized scholars of Medinese origin, upon whom they relied for the gathering of relevant materials—particularly Muḥammad ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742). They also seem to have cultivated relations with scholars from other centers, however, such as the Kūfans al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) and 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam al-Kalbī (d. 147/764). It is possible that, in the same vein, they encouraged work among some Syrian scholars who collected local materials, for example on the theme of *futūḥ*.⁵⁵ Material of Syrian origin that was not amicable to the Umayyads—for example, the Ḥimṣī traditions in which the local Qaḥṭānī tribesmen contest the claims to leadership of the Quraysh (including, of course, the Umayyads)⁵⁶—has, by chance, survived, but was not incorporated into the main collections of narrations about Islamic origins, perhaps because the Umayyads (and later, the 'Abbāsids) were careful to have them excluded. The same is true of the traditions hostile to 'Alī and his cause, which are in any case relatively few.

⁵²Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, IV, 428–29 (no. 741).

⁵³*Ibid.*, VI, 145 (no. 312).

⁵⁴Numerous accounts in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*; they related them, among others, to the Syrian historian al-Walīd ibn Muslim al-Umawī. For other early Syrian historians, see Donner, "The Problem of Early Arabic Historiography in Syria."

⁵⁵In addition to Ṣafwān ibn 'Amr and 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Jubayr, noted above, Sa'īd ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tanūkhī (d. 167/783 or 168) might have served in this role. On him see Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, IV, 59–61 (no. 102).

⁵⁶See above, 186. These traditions are preserved in the *Kitāb al-fitan* of Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād (d. ca. 228/844). On this text, see below, 228 and n. 60.

Other matters that were important to first and second-century Syrian Muslims—concerns over the Khazars to the north, the Berber revolts of late Umayyad times, etc.—were only weakly taken up into the later “mainstream” Sunnī historiographical tradition.

Other Marginal Themes: Apocalyptic

Although most of the identifiable marginal themes were linked to specific localities, some material that was cultivated in many places in the community of Believers nevertheless was relegated to marginal status as the canonical origins narrative coalesced in the second and third centuries AH. One such body of material that was not taken up as a major thematic focus consisted of accounts of an apocalyptic nature. (By “apocalyptic” we mean accounts that convey predictions of the imminent approach of the Last Judgment, or other information about that event.) Apocalyptic ideas enjoyed wide currency in all Near Eastern religious communities in the years before and following the rise of Islam.⁵⁷ Indeed, apocalyptic notions were so widespread that the dramatic events associated with the rise of Islam in the early and middle decades of the seventh century CE were frequently interpreted by Jews and Christians as being portents of the impending apocalypse.⁵⁸ Within the early community of Believers, apocalyptic accounts—usually referred to by the terms *fitan* or *malāḥim*⁵⁹—were widespread, and remnants of this material are widely scattered in collections of *ḥadīth* and in a few surviving *fitan* or *malāḥim* texts, such as the *Kitāb al-fitān* of Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād (d. ca. 228/844), a compilation collecting many apocalyptic traditions dating to Umayyad times.⁶⁰

⁵⁷See Donner, “The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War.”

⁵⁸See Conrad, “Portents of the Hour;” Lewis, “An Apocalyptic View of Islamic History.”

⁵⁹As noted above, 186 n. 4, the term *fitna* referred in Islamic discourse both to political upheaval and to apocalyptic events. The Last Day was commonly expected to be preceded by a prolonged period of dreadful slaughter (*malāḥim*) associated with the appearance of the Antichrist, and with concomitant widespread temptations (*fitan*) to seize worldly power or gain.

⁶⁰They include predictions of the Qaḥṭānī *mahdī* who would come after an oppressive caliph of Quraysh expels Yemenites from Syria, descriptions of the important role Yemenites would play in the *malāḥim* (bloody battles) against the Byzantines presaging the end of the world, etc. A cursory description of this text, with listing

Functionally, many apocalyptic accounts can be seen to articulate the issues underlying such themes as *umma*, *nubūwa*, *futūḥ*, *fitna*, etc.—the theological and political relationship between the Muslim community and other monotheist communities, the contending claims of various aspirants to leadership within the community, etc. Structurally, as noted above, apocalyptic accounts take the form of attempts to establish the legitimacy of a particular claim by describing, in essence, the history of the future.⁶¹ However, many apocalyptic accounts, which take the form of predictions of the impending Last Day, anticipate the impending End as the culmination of a series of well-known, recent events; for this reason, such accounts have a strongly “historical” character.⁶²

As widespread and vibrant as this concern for apocalyptic ideas seems to have been, however, it was passed over by most of the compilers of large historical works of the second and third centuries. That most apocalyptic accounts did not make it into the emerging historical “canon” is doubtless in part to be explained by the fact that many took the form of time-bound predictions of anticipated events that had clearly failed to materialize as foretold; for this reason, they undermined and endangered the theme of *nubūwa* itself.

of main chapters, was provided by Krenkow, “The Book of Strife.” On the Qaḥṭānī traditions, see Madelung, “Apocalyptic Prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad Age.” Nu‘aym’s text also contains other apocalyptic accounts, some of them studied in Madelung, “The Sufyānī between Tradition and History.” On early apocalyptic traditions see also Cook, “An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle.”

⁶¹See Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*; Conrad, “Portents of the Hour.”

⁶²On this see Alexander, “Medieval Apocalypses as Historical Sources.”

CHAPTER 10

CHRONOLOGY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRONOLOGICAL SCHEMES

CHRONOLOGY is often seen—rightly, I believe—as a crucial component in any sophisticated historiographical tradition.¹ It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that some modern authors have suggested that the concern for chronology represents the true inception of Islamic historical writing. According to this view, the first step in the evolution of Islamic historical writing was the construction of bare chronological lists (possibly based in part on documents): chronological lists of caliphs, lists of events in the Prophet's life, etc. Into this scaffolding, according to this view, was stuffed all kinds of secondary, fabricated material—legal and exegetical judgments disguised as *ḥadīths*, etc.²

There can be no doubt that the compilation of sequential and chronological lists did take place, and that such efforts represented an important step in the evolution of Islamic historical writing. It appears, however, that these lists represented not the beginnings of Islamic historiography, but rather a secondary phase in its development; it is for

¹Cf. Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 40–45; Noth/Conrad, 40–48. Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 189–214, treats the role of numerological symbolism in the chronology of Muḥammad's life.

²Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 3–17; Rotter, "Abū Zur'a," 80–104, esp. 91–92, 99–100. Such a view, if borne out by the evidence, would have dire implications for the historicity or reliability of our materials, most of which would have to be viewed as spurious and untrustworthy as the basis for historical reconstruction.

this reason that Noth places chronology among the “secondary themes” of Islamic historical writing.³ In fact, chronology did not have an easy beginning in the Islamic tradition. The strongly pietistic focus of the early community of Believers, with its tendency to express itself in timeless pious or moral verities, was the absolute enemy of chronological concerns. The original outlook of the early Believers, as we have seen, was both profoundly pious and markedly ahistorical. And, when truly historical reports (that is, ones that related specific events, as opposed to timeless moral or pious “situations”) did begin to circulate in the community of Believers as the nascent historiographical themes began to come into focus, the majority of such reports probably lacked any specific dating. Most were probably cast simply as stories about some aspect of what was becoming recognized as the key events of the recent past. The appearance of sequential lists (and their close congener, chronological schemes), then, was part of an effort to overcome the chronological uncertainties and contradictions in an existing mass of narrative accounts that must, therefore, be older than the lists and chronological schemes themselves.⁴

As the historicizing impulse took hold towards the end of the first century AH, and as Muslims gathered more and more disconnected historical information about the early Islamic period during the last third of the first century and thereafter, they found themselves faced with a large body of material the exact chronological relationships of which had been forgotten or obscured by an overlay of fictitious material. It was in the matter of chronology, perhaps, that the early Muslims’ essentially ahistorical outlook created the gravest obstacles for the development of Islamic historiography, and for the early period, at least, chronology constitutes one of the weakest points of the Islamic historical tradition.

³Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 41; Noth/Conrad, 42. See also Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 111, 128, 142–48.

⁴Note that the crucial fact is not whether the early Believers may have been *familiar* with the notion of continuous dating systems, but whether they *needed* one to establish chronological order in their own narratives. Even the earliest Believers in Mecca and Yathrib may have been familiar with the Himyarite calendar used in Yemen, and with the dating eras used in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in Byzantine and Sasanian times.

Diverse efforts were made to bring order out of this chronological chaos, and the residue of these efforts is readily discernible in the extant sources. Typically, such efforts take the form of what we may call **CONTEXTUAL ACCOUNTS** or **CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS**, because their purpose is to provide a firm context in which a given event belongs, or even a precise date for it; that is, to provide a relative or absolute dating for the event.

Efforts to provide relative datings seem to have come first. Some such accounts attempt to date events in relation to the personal history of the narrator, as when Anas ibn Mālik (d. 93/712) states that the Prophet came to Medina when he (Anas) was ten years old, and died when he was twenty.⁵ Others—very frequently encountered—are essentially synchronisms linking the chronologically unknown to the known, or at least relating them in a sequence. For example, we may encounter an account stating that “the conquest of Damascus occurred after the battle of Yarmūk,”⁶ or noting that “the story of the lie (*ḥadīth al-ifk*) belongs to the raid to al-Muraysī’.”⁷ Accounts such as the last, in which an episode is referred to by name only, make it clear that the “facts” of the episode (in this case the *ḥadīth al-ifk*, an episode involving the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha) are assumed known, and that the dating of the episode is therefore a secondary procedure.⁸ An especially significant example of relative dating occurs in the form of a long account provided by al-Zuhri, who may have been more than anyone else responsible for establishing the generally accepted version of the sequential order in which the main episodes of the Islamic origins story took place.⁹

⁵Abū Zur‘a al-Dimashqī, *Ta’rikh*, 416 (no. 988: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ibrāhīm ← Sufyān ← al-Zuhri ← Anas ibn Mālik). See also *ibid.*, 583–84 (nos. 1643–44), on al-Zuhri’s arrival in Damascus just before ‘Abd al-Malik’s march against Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr; used to date Zuhri’s age.

⁶Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rikh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid), I, 513 (← Sayf). Many similar accounts are found in *ibid.*, I, 493–515.

⁷Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, III, 24 (al-Nu‘mān ibn Rāshid ← al-Zuhri).

⁸Other examples: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 2646, on the affair of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar and Abū Sarwa’a drinking wine; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh* (ed. Zakkār), I, 240, on Mu‘āwiya and Ziyād ibn Abīhi.

⁹Al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Muṣannaf*, V, 452–66 (no. 9970: ← al-Zuhri). Another fragment is found in al-Wāqidi, *Maghāzī*, 889 (Ma‘mar ← al-Zuhri). Al-Zuhri was one of the main teachers of, among others, Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, whose *Sīra* in general treats

This single account sketches, with few details, the campaigns and main events from the Prophet's later years until the negotiations to end the First Civil War more than 30 years later.

Some assistance in drawing up relative chronologies was provided by the fact that a significant number of early accounts made explicit or implicit reference to the caliph reigning when a certain event took place. This meant that, if an accurate list of the early caliphs, with their lengths of reign, could be drawn up, many isolated accounts could be given fairly firm sequential placement. Hence we find a number of accounts the purpose of which was to confirm (or to assert) the length of a particular caliph's rule, e.g. "Abū Bakr's caliphate was two years, three months, and ten days long."¹⁰ These ultimately were combined to form sequential lists of the early caliphs and their lengths of reign.¹¹

In some cases, early historians created contextual traditions that simply asserted the placement of a particular event relative to this kind of chronology by regnal years. Thus we read in one case that the battle of Fihl occurred in 'Umar's caliphate, six months after his accession.¹² Such accounts linking events to a particular regnal year occur, however, rather seldom; most of them seem to pertain to the reign of 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, such as one that states: "Al-Walīd ibn 'Uqba was appointed governor of al-Kūfa to replace Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ in the year eight of 'Uthmān's rule."¹³ The reason for the scarcity of this method of fixing the date may be because it was abandoned for the more exact system of dating by *hijra* years (see below); but it is also possible that such dates may have had a certain polemical utility in describing 'Uthmān's reign,

the episodes of Muḥammad's life in the same order as proposed by al-Zuhrī (Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 120–21; *idem*, "al-Zuhrī," 7).

¹⁰Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III.1, 143–44 (al-Wāqidi ← al-Laythī ← Muḥammad ibn Ḥamza ibn 'Amr ← his father) ('Umar ibn 'Imrān ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq ← 'Umar ibn Ḥusayn, *mawlā* of Āl Maẓ'un ← Ṭalḥa ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr) (Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ← al-Zuhrī ← 'Urwa ← 'Ā'isha). Note that the same paragraph includes an account of Abū Ma'shar giving a different length of reign.

¹¹Rotter, "Abū Zur'a," esp. 91–92.

¹²Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḥ madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid), I, 480 (Abū Ma'shar).

¹³Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, I, 2840 (Sayf ← Muḥammad and Ṭalḥa); cf. *ibid.*, I, 2889 bottom, 2895 top.

which according to the traditional view consisted of six good years followed by six bad years.¹⁴ Hence knowing in which half of 'Uthmān's reign an event occurred would give the discerning reader an idea of how the act in question might be evaluated in moral terms.

An effort was also made to establish which governors were appointed by a particular caliph, since many accounts that mentioned a governor or other appointee could in this way also be dated in relative terms. Thus, for example, we find an account that states that "'Umar died and was succeeded by 'Uthmān. He removed Abū Mūsā [al-Ash'arī] from [the governorship of] al-Baṣra and appointed 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir over it."¹⁵

The general intent of all such efforts was to create an interlocking relative chronology, one in which each event could ideally be dated in reference to every other event. A fragment of such an early relative chronological "grid" is perhaps preserved in an account in Abū Zur'a's *Ta'rikh*. It gives the following sequence of relative datings, mixed with some "absolute" datings: Badr, 1½ years after Muḥammad's arrival in Medina; Uḥud, one year after Badr; Khandaq, year 4; raid on Banū l-Muṣṭaliq, year 5; Khaybar, year 6; al-Ḥudaybiya, in year of Khaybar; Conquest [of Mecca], year 8; Qurayza, year of Khandaq.¹⁶

All the techniques described above had a certain utility, and were used by early historians seeking to grapple with the chronological ambiguities and difficulties that the vast body of accounts presented. But such systems of dating based on relative chronology were at best cumbersome, and in many cases greater ease of use as well as greater precision was deemed necessary. For these reasons, the use of relative datings gradually fell out of favor and were ultimately replaced by a system of absolute dating based on the *hijra* era.

There were apparently some efforts to find an absolute system of chronology for dating events before the *hijra* era came to be widely

¹⁴See above, 193.

¹⁵Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* (Leningrad MS), fol. 255v (Ya'qūb ← al-Ḥajjāj ibn Manī' ← his grandfather ← al-Zuhri). Such accounts can also, of course, be classified as belonging to the theme of "cult and administration." See also below, 238–39, on fixing the dates of rule of governors, etc., with *hijra* dates.

¹⁶Abū Zur'a, *Ta'rikh*, 165 (no. 40). Another example: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1255 (al-Sha'bī).

used by historians for this purpose. Even before Islam, various systems for dating events had been applied in the Ḥijāz. The most common technique for dating appears to have been to name a certain year in which some memorable event had occurred, and to count from that year for a time until another "named year" was designated; events could then be dated as so many years after the given named year. Vestiges of such a system are visible even as late as the middle of the second/eighth century; for example, an apocalyptic tradition in Nu'aym ibn Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-fitan* dates events from the conquest of Syria.¹⁷ One problem with this method had been that each community had used different named years, so that it was difficult to correlate datings from different places. The Quraysh of Mecca are said to have dated events from the "year of the elephant" (*'ām al-fīl*), named after the campaign (including elephants in the army) sent against the Ḥijāz by Abyssinian troops in the Yemen; before the year of the elephant, they are said to have dated from the death of Ka'b ibn Lu'ayy. The 'Abs and Fazāra tribes of north Arabia, on the other hand, dated from the *Yawm al-Jabala*, and the Aws and Khazraj of Yathrib from the "year of the forts" (*'ām al-āṭām*).¹⁸ After the rise of Islam, these older methods continued in use, or were reapplied, in an effort to bring chronological order to the historical accounts about Islamic origins. Certain events in the Prophet's life, or in the life of his ancestors, were related according to the Quraysh's old benchmark, the year of the elephant—which, since the Prophet was said by some to have been born in that year, could be expressed as years

¹⁷See Cook, "An Early Islamic Apocalyptic Chronicle."

¹⁸Al-Mas'ūdī, *Tanbih*, 202–208. An account of al-Wāqidī claims that the "Arabs" (i.e. before Islam) dated from the (year of) the elephant, then from the building of the Ka'ba: Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rīkh*, 103–104 (no. 290). See also the accounts in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 201, 1154–55. On pre-Islamic Arabian calendars and dating systems, see Beeston, *Epigraphic South Arabian Calendars and Dating*; *idem*, "New Light on the Ḥimyaritic Calendar;" Pirenne, "Palaeographical Chronology;" Hamidullah, "The *Nasī'*, the *Hijrah* Calendar and the Need of Preparing a new Concordance for the *Hijrah* and Gregorian Eras," 1–18; Ali, *Upstream-Downstream*; and the old studies, still useful, of Caussin de Perceval, "Mémoire sur le calendrier arabe avant l'islamisme;" Effendi, "Mémoire sur le calendrier arabe avant l'islamisme;" Sprenger, "Über den Kalender der Araber vor Mohammad;" Moberg, *An-Nasī' (Koran 9, 37) in der islamischen Tradition*.

in his lifetime.¹⁹ We learn, for example, that Muḥammad's grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib died when the Prophet was eight years, two months old; that the Prophet married Khadīja in his twenty-fifth year; and so on.²⁰ For the years after the *hijra*, early authorities seem to have modified the pre-Islamic practice of using named years by naming every year after some event rather than using one "benchmark" year and counting from it.²¹ The names of the years themselves thus provided a sequential listing of at least some of the most salient events in early Islamic history, to which other events could be pegged. We find, for example, reference to the "year of Khaybar" and "year of the Ditch," named after those two key engagements in Muḥammad's career, to a "year of Yarmūk" (after the battle in Syria), and to a "year of Ashes" (referring to a severe drought during the conquest period).²² In several cases, particularly for the lifetime of the Prophet, two or more named years seem to refer to the same *hijra* year. The named years of which we know for the period following the death of the Prophet suggest that what survives is the Syrian (Umayyad-sponsored?) tradition, as the events referred to are mostly in Syria or involve the Umayyad regime. This process of naming years by a salient event suggests that a relative chronological sequence for at least these "benchmark" events may already have been established.

It was the application of the *hijra* era to date historical accounts that finally provided a tool adequate for the needs of Muslim historians

¹⁹The equation of Muḥammad's birth year with the year of the elephant only became the consensus view after some time; on this, see Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad."

²⁰Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 150–51. Similar relative dating sequences, on the authority of al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721), are found in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1253, 1255: the Fijār war was twenty years after the "Year of the Elephant," the building of the Ka'ba was fifteen years after the "Year of Fijār" (*'ām al-fijār*), etc. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2730 (al-Wāqidī), in which 'Umar claims to have been born four years before Fijār. Another possible example, apparently going back to al-Sha'bī, is found in al-Barrādī, *Jawāhir al-muntaqāt*, 44–45. See al-Sakhāwī, *Al-I'lān bi-l-taubīkh*, 82: "they used to name every year by the event that occurred in it...."

²¹It is of course possible that the naming every year may have been practiced before Islam, but that we have lost record of it.

²²For a more complete list of named years, see the Appendix to this chapter, which attempts to identify them with *hijra* dates.

in matters of chronology. The use of *hijra* dates began quite early; according to most traditional accounts it was instituted early in the reign of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb by the caliph himself,²³ and although we may wish to take the stories associated with its introduction with a grain of salt, the survival of papyri and other documents dated to the early 20s and 30s of the *hijra* era shows that the system itself was in place by this time.²⁴ The very early institution of the *hijra* era for dating official correspondence and government documents, however, proved of little assistance to transmitters of historical *akhbār*. One reason for this is that few historical accounts actually reproduced early documents or official correspondence, or were based on them; rather, the vast majority of these *akhbār* arose outside official circles and were based on personal recollections of individuals or on tribal oral traditions which by their very nature were not dated. The transmitters of historical accounts were thus unable to assign a *hijra* date to the events described in them, despite the use of the *hijra* dating system in official correspondence, until the events had been arranged in some kind of chronological sequence in relation to one another. The widespread *hijra*-dating of various episodes, in other words, became feasible for historians only after the lengthy process of establishing relative chronologies, described above, was fairly well advanced. For example, the simple statement that a governor's misbehavior led to his dismissal by a particular caliph could not be dated in *hijra* years until one had obtained some idea of the sequence and lengths of the reigns of various caliphs and the sequence of the governors who served under them. Of course, the fact that in some cases the early form of historical material was as a connected

²³E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1250–56, 2480; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, I, 7–8; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb al-ta'rikh*, 104 (no. 291). A few reports state that the practice was begun already by the Prophet. The usual date assigned to the event is AH 16, or 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years after 'Umar's accession as caliph.

²⁴The earliest attestation of the system is on a papyrus dated to Jumādā II 22 AH: Grohmann, *Einführung und Chrestomathie*, I, 221. The earliest secure numismatic attestation of the *hijra* era is on a coin of AH 23, with likely (but not absolutely certain) dates attested for the years 22 and 21 (Stuart Sears, personal communication). The earliest extant inscriptional attestation is found on a tombstone of 31/652: Hawary, "The Most Ancient Islamic Monument Known." The Batman Su and Cyprus inscriptions of AH 22 and 29, respectively, listed in Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, eds., *RCEA*, I, 5–6, are probably bogus.

narrative on a certain theme meant that a relative chronology of those events, at least, was already established; but the absolute chronology was often difficult to establish, the more so because information on one theme was related with little reference to other themes, making it necessary somehow to synchronize their material: given that Yarmūk was after Ajnādayn, what was its chronological relationship to al-Qādisiyya? Given that the naval battle of Dhāt al-Ṣawārī was after the raid on Malatya, what was its chronological relationship to the battle of the Camel? Given that the battle of the Camel was before the battle of Ṣiffin, what was its chronological relationship to Mu'āwiya's occupation of Egypt? Countless questions of relative chronology of this kind needed to be sorted out before much progress could be made dating the myriad events described in the mass of accounts the Muslim historians of the late first and early second centuries had to deal with. And, of course, the fact that in this mass of accounts were many that were not accurate recollections of actual events, but fabrications designed to serve some political, theological, or social interest, only complicated matters.

For this reason it is hardly surprising to find that many of the early dated accounts combine one or several kinds of relative dating with an absolute *hijra* date or dates. The following two examples will illustrate this clearly:

Abū Bakr ruled for two years and four months... [starting in] year 11 of the *hijra*. In the remainder of that year, God accepted the repentance [of the rebels of the *ridḍa* wars], so the Muslims called year 11 "the year of repentance" (*sanat al-tawba*) because of God's pardon bestowed upon the bedouins (*al-'arab*) in it. Then Abū Bakr wrote to Khālīd ibn al-Walīd after the bedouin had returned to [their allegiance to] Islam, ordering him to march against Musaylima the liar and the unbelievers of Banū Ḥanīfa; that was in the year 12.²⁵

²⁵Abū Zur'a, *Ta'rikh*, 170–71 (nos. 50–51). Note that the paragraph numberings provided by the editor do not occur in the manuscript, and these two paragraphs seem to constitute a single account.

In this account, the *hijra* dates are clearly coordinated with earlier dating techniques including the establishment of Abū Bakr's length of reign, a sequence of events (Abū Bakr's accession—pardon of *ridda* rebels—Khālīd ordered to march against Musaylima), and the use of "named years" which now had to be identified with corresponding *hijra* years. A second account reveals the effort to establish a correspondence between *hijra* and named years:

The years of 'Umar[']s caliphate] are well known: the year of al-Jābiya, AH 16; and [the year of] Sargh, AH 17; and [the year of] Ashes, AH 18....²⁶

Efforts to establish relative chronological relationships may have begun as early as the first century AH, and was actively pursued by the end of that century. The assignment of *hijra* dates to these events seems to have gotten underway in earnest early in the second century AH, and appears to have been fully developed by the end of the second century. Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) and al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) appear to have drawn up relative chronologies of events in the life of Muḥammad and the first caliphs.²⁷ Not surprisingly, monographs and books began to be compiled by various traditionists/historians who were interested in the problem of chronology. Perhaps the first monograph on chronological problems that can be identified was al-Zuhri's "Years of the Caliphs" (*Asnān al-khulafā'*). A fragment of it that survives in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* is concerned with lengths of reign: "Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya died at the age of 39; his reign was three years, six months according to one [authority]; but it is said [by others] that it was [three years], eight months."²⁸ This fragment reveals that already before al-Zuhri's time, questions of relative chronology were being debated by transmitters, who in this instance disagreed on the length of Yazīd's reign. The secondary character of this material is obvious; clearly already in al-Zuhri's day there was something that needed to be dated, and the chronological relationships were desired in order to

²⁶Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, XII, 709:17–23 (al-Wāqidī).

²⁷For Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, see accounts in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1141, 1245–46, 1835, 2129, 2529–30.

²⁸*Ibid.*, II, 428.

organize and make sense of older, pre-existing material. The fact that the chronological schemes so created were secondary, however, has no necessary bearing on the authenticity (or lack of it) of the material being organized, which needs to be judged on its own terms.²⁹

Somewhat later began to appear books bearing the title *ta'rikh*, "dating."³⁰ The earliest of these of which we have record are the *Kitāb al-ta'rikh* of 'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam (d. ca. 147/764), the *Ta'rikh al-khulafā'*, "Dating of the Caliphs," of Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) and the book with the same title by Abū Ma'shar (d. 170/786); numerous fragments from the last-mentioned reveal that it was concerned, as its title suggests, with assigning *hijra* dates to the events described.³¹ In some cases, annalists eschewed strict arrangement by years for the earliest parts of the origins story, where chronology was uncertain—as with the *Kitāb al-ta'rikh* of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/852), which begins its annals with the *hijra* but which at first does not have entries for every year, into the twenties and thirties AH. Eventually the term *ta'rikh*, via its use to designate any annalistic compilation—that is, a compilation where the dating scheme provided its overt structure—came to mean "history" generally, but the original technical sense seems to have been "dating," and it is no mere coincidence that some of the earliest extant books that bear the title *kitāb al-ta'rikh* are heavily (or exclusively) collections of chronological accounts, often with a minimum of narrative material.³² The *Kitāb al-ta'rikh* of Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī (d. 280/813), for example, consists almost entirely of brief accounts dat-

²⁹ *Pace* the implication of Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 7; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 3-7 and *infra*, and others following him, rejected Sayf's accounts in part because they found their chronology suspect.

³⁰ On the etymology of the term *ta'rikh*, see Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 11-17.

³¹ Many accounts in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*; see index s.v. Abū Ma'shar. 'Awāna's *Kitāb al-ta'rikh* is mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, I, 91 (the Dodge translation appears to leave this text out; it should appear on p. 197). The surviving papyrus fragment of Ibn Ishāq's *Ta'rikh al-khulafā'* shows it to have included narrative *akhbār*, which were organized in an annalistic framework: see Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 80-99.

³² This gives rise to the ironic situation that the modern investigator, wishing to locate substantive information about the history of various events, is often best served by compilations with titles *other* than "*ta'rikh*."

ing events and (especially) people, with little additional information provided; it was clearly intended as a chronological aid or reference for use by those who needed to check relative or absolute chronological relationships among people and events that were already familiar to them.³³ Other works with this title, such as those by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/852) and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt al-‘Uṣfurī (d. 240/854), contain some substantive historical information along with the “dating,” but it is the dating that provides the structure and rationale for these works, hence their titles (although Ibn Ḥabīb’s application of the annalistic structure is erratic).³⁴ Other authors made the admixture of substantive knowledge (*‘ilm*, *ma‘rifa*) about the past and efforts to put it in chronological order clear in their titles, for example the *Kitāb al-ma‘rifa wa-l-ta’rikh* of Abū Yūsuf Ya‘qūb ibn Sufyān al-Fasawī (d. 277/890).³⁵

Early efforts to provide relative or absolute (*hijra*) datings to events are most readily visible not from the surviving titles of works with a chronological orientation, however, but in the myriad chronological accounts that survive in extant historical compilations. From them it becomes clear that, while many individuals may have dated a few events according to knowledge available to them or according to their own rea-

³³This quality is found in accounts in many other compilations; for example, Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, I, 240: “And in this year (44 AH) there occurred the affair of Mu‘āwiya and Ziyād.” (*kāna min amri Mu‘āwiyata wa-Ziyādin al-ladhī kāna*). Clearly the reader is expected to know the particulars of the story. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 2646, on ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Umar and Abū Sarwa’a in Egypt.

³⁴Khalīfa’s text is arranged strictly on an annalistic basis. The Andalusian Ibn Ḥabīb’s work reflects the author’s special interest in Spain; roughly one third is devoted to the pre-Islamic “preparation” for Muḥammad’s mission (Creation, earlier prophets, etc.); another third, roughly, is an annalistic treatment of the years from the Prophet until the conquest of al-Andalus at the end of the first century AH; and the final third deals with al-Andalus itself—its conquest, settlement by the conquerors, and prominent scholars—but not in annalistic form, although an effort is made to date the scholars mentioned.

³⁵The manuscript covering the first part of the work, which must have covered the period of Islamic origins, is lost; the published text abruptly picks up with an annalistic presentation from 135 AH until 241 AH (I, 110–212). The annalistic part of the work is followed by an extensive section of *tarājim* or scholarly biographies, many dealing with the early period.

soning, certain transmitters made a concerted effort to construct what we may call “chronological schemes” or comprehensive chronological frameworks to include most events of early Islamic history. Among the leading “chronological schematizers” were the following:

‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī (d. 103/721): Only a few chronological accounts on the direct authority of al-Sha‘bī are recorded, but these and some conveyed via other transmitters (Sayf, al-Madā’inī, etc.) suggest that he was concerned with chronology (his general activity as a collector of historical accounts is well known). The few accounts recorded seem to deal with events in the conquest of the eastern provinces; one deals with the chronology of the Prophet’s life.³⁶ Our comments on al-Sha‘bī’s chronological activity must remain tentative, however, because only a small sample of his chronological accounts has been recovered.

Muḥammad ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742): Although very few chronological accounts directly attributed to al-Zuhrī exist, a number of datings are attributed to him by Ibn Ishāq and al-Madā’inī, and the similarity of these two later scholars’ chronological schemes for events of the Prophet’s life, at least, suggest that al-Zuhrī may have played a large role in establishing the basic chronology of the *Sīra*.

Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767): Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Yasār, a scholar of Medinese origin who spent the end of his life in the service of the ‘Abbāsids and wrote his *Sīra* or biography of Muḥammad at their behest, appears to have been one of the most important architects of chronological schemes. Although he conveyed a large number of substantive reports about many chapters in early Islamic history, including the civil wars, the history of the later caliphs, etc., extant *chronological* accounts transmitted on his authority seem to focus mainly on the life of the Prophet after the *hijra*, and on the early Islamic conquests; few, if any, exist on the chronology of events of the civil wars or later caliphs. Ibn Ishāq offers the great majority of these chronological accounts with no informant, suggesting they are his own opinion; very rarely, he lists al-Zuhrī or someone else as informant.³⁷ Ibn Ishāq’s chronological work is quite remarkable, as he tries in every case to give an absolute date for

³⁶The latter is al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 1255.

³⁷Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*, I, 16, 29, 39, 56, 57, 99; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, I, 125.

the event at hand—stating the *hijra* year, month, even the day in some cases. Sometimes, of course, he is forced to admit uncertainty about the dating of an event, or gives approximate or relative dating. For example, in one instance he notes that the raid on al-Rajī‘ took place in AH 3, after the battle of Uḥud (i.e. between the tenth and twelfth months—Shawwāl and Dhū l-Ḥijja—of the year), without specifying more closely when.³⁸ In some accounts, we can see that Ibn Ishāq conveys substantive material about an event that he obtained from earlier informants, but that he adds to it, at times, his own chronological gloss, evidently missing from the original. In the middle of one of his accounts on the raid to Bi‘r Ma‘ūna, for example, we find the following passage: “The Prophet sent out—Ibn Ishāq says: and that was in Ṣafar, four months after [the battle of] Uḥud—al-Mundhir ibn ‘Amr, brother of the Banū Sā‘ida, with 40 men...”³⁹

Abū Ma‘shar (d. 170/786): Abū Ma‘shar Najīb ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sindī circulated numerous accounts dealing with the Islamic conquests in all areas; he also seems to have tried to establish the chronology of the first caliphs, and possibly events in the First Civil War. No accounts on the chronology of the Prophet’s life appear to have been circulated by him, however. No earlier informant is listed in any of his chronological accounts, suggesting that he established the chronological reconstruction he relates. Most of his accounts offer absolute (*hijra*) chronologies; occasionally he provides an account with a relative chronology.⁴⁰ Certain events (e.g. the death of ‘Umar) he dates to the day, month, and year, followed by his estimate of the exact du-

³⁸Khalīfa ibn Khattāt, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 39. See also the following chronological accounts of Ibn Ishāq: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2078, Abū Bakr dispatches an army to Syria sometime after the pilgrimage of year 12 (i.e. in the last days of 12 AH, or in 13 AH?); Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid), I, 480, the conquest of Fihl was six months after ‘Umar acceded to the caliphate, which was twelve years, three months, and 29 days after *hijra*; Khalīfa, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 105, Abū Bakr died two years, three months, and twelve days after Muḥammad died; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2579, Caesarea falls before the conquest of Egypt in AH 20, but the date is uncertain.

³⁹Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 42. The *isnād* is: ... Ibn Ishāq ← Abū Ishāq ibn Yasār ← 1) al-Mughīra ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām, and 2) ‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Amr ibn Ḥazm.

⁴⁰E.g. Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid), I, 480, on Fihl being six months after the accession of ‘Umar; cf. al-Azdī, *Futūḥ al-Shām*, 272, where Fihl

ration of 'Umar's reign as caliph in years, months, and days.⁴¹ Abū Ma'shar wrote a *Ta'riḫ al-khulafā* (of special significance for chronology) and a *Kitāb al-maghāzī*, used by al-Wāqidī, Ibn Sa'd, and al-Ṭabarī.⁴²

'*Abd Allāh ibn Lahī'a* (d. 174/790): The few chronological accounts of Ibn Lahī'a all deal with the conquest of Syria; most he received via Abū l-Aswad (i.e. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nawfal, d. 131/748) from 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 94/712) and it is not entirely clear whether the systematizer of chronological information was Ibn Lahī'a or one of his informants. Once again, we are hampered by the small size of the sample.⁴³ The datings he offers are absolute (*hijra*) dates by year, occasionally giving months as well.

Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795): The great traditionist Mālik provides a few chronological accounts, all of which deal with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. He cites no informant, suggesting that the chronological relationships are his own estimates; some accounts offer relative datings, others absolute (*hijra*) dates. This is, again, a small sample, but one that is noteworthy for its consistency.⁴⁴

Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. ca. 184/800): Sayf, who was one of al-Ṭabarī's main informants for the events of the *ridda* wars and the early Islamic conquests in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, includes many datings of specific events in many of his lengthy accounts, and must be reckoned among the most important architects of chronological schemes. Sayf's chronology was sharply criticized for its apparent inconsistency and implausibility by de Goeje, Wellhausen, and others; we should note, however, that since the chronological information is usually imbedded in lengthy reports in which Sayf combines information from several informants, it is not entirely clear whether the chronology is the work of Sayf himself, or of his informants; at least one of his informants,

is put sixteen months after 'Umar's accession—clearly there is some confusion in transmission in these accounts.

⁴¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 2627.

⁴² GAS, I, 292.

⁴³ Ibn Lahī'a's chronological accounts are encountered especially in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*.

⁴⁴ Mālik's chronological accounts are found especially in Abū Zur'a al-Dimashqī's *Kitāb al-ta'riḫ*.

‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī,⁴⁵ appears to have circulated chronological accounts of his own, as we have seen above. Most of Sayf’s chronological determinations are given as absolute (*hijra*) dates.

Al-Walīd ibn Muslim (d. 195/811) or *Yahyā ibn Sa‘īd al-Umawī* (d. 194/809): al-Walīd ibn Muslim related chronological information mainly on the conquest of Syria; a few reports deal with the fortunes of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd and with the *ridda* leader Musaylima, but these, too, are still part of the Syrian tradition. Most of al-Walīd ibn Muslim’s chronological accounts seem to come from an informant he calls “al-Umawī” or “al-shaykh al-Umawī,” possibly to be identified with Yahyā ibn Sa‘īd al-Umawī (d. 194/809), author of a lost *Kitāb al-maghāzī*.⁴⁶

Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. 204/819): A number of chronological accounts from Ibn al-Kalbī survive, all of which deal with the conquests on the Byzantine front and North Africa, or raids against the Byzantines during the Umayyad period; one describes ‘Uthmān’s marriage to a woman of the Kalb tribe. None are extant on the civil wars, the conquests in the eastern provinces, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, or the history of the caliphs after the Rāshidūn. No earlier informants are listed in the accounts, which makes them appear to be Ibn al-Kalbī’s own chronological work. Most offer absolute (*hijra*) datings by year; a few offer the month or even the day of a particular event. These accounts are presumably survivals from his *Kitāb al-ta’rīkh* or his *Kitāb ta’rīkh ajnād al-khulafā’*, both of which are mentioned in the *Fihrist*.⁴⁷

Al-Wāqidi (d. 207/823): Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Wāqidi was one of the major chronological systematizers of the early Islamic historiographical tradition. He circulated many accounts providing datings for events in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and for the early Islamic conquests in east and west. With very few exceptions, his chronological pronouncements are given without any indication of earlier authorities,

⁴⁵Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2031 (*isnād*: Sayf ← ‘Amr ← al-Sha‘bī); *ibid.*, I, 2161–62 (*isnād*: Sayf ← Mujālid ← al-Sha‘bī); possibly *ibid.*, I, 2245 (*isnād*: Sayf ← ‘Amr ← al-Sha‘bī?).

⁴⁶On Yahyā ibn Sa‘īd, see *GAS*, I, 293.

⁴⁷Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (ed. Flügel), I, 97:8; trans. Dodge, 204.

suggesting that it is his own work.⁴⁸ Al-Wāqidī usually offers an absolute (*hijra*) date for an event. Like Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī sometimes tries to date things right to the day, and offers his reckoning of the exact duration of the caliphs' reigns.⁴⁹

Abū 'Ubayda Ma'mar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 210/825): A very few chronological accounts attributed to Abū 'Ubayda are cited in Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt's *Ta'rikh*; they all refer to Iranian matters—history of the Sasanians, or the Islamic conquests in Iran. No earlier informant is listed in any surviving account, suggesting that the chronological work is that of Abū 'Ubayda. Absolute chronologies, with *hijra* year only, are consistently provided. The small size of the sample means that our observations must be considered tentative.

'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Madā'inī (d. ca. 235/850?): Al-Madā'inī appears also to have been fairly active in trying to establish chronological relationships for the narratives of Islamic origins. His numerous surviving chronological accounts deal with events in the life of the Prophet and the conquests (mainly in the east); he may also have provided datings for events of the First Civil War.⁵⁰ At times, al-Madā'inī's chronological accounts cite various informants, including al-Zuhrī, al-Sha'bī, 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, and others; it is possible that he received relative or absolute chronological information from some of these. His own datings, however, are consistently in absolute (*hijra*) terms. The similarity of his datings for events in the life of the Prophet to those of Ibn Ishāq suggest that the chronological work of al-Zuhrī may lie behind the datings of both.

In addition to the figures listed above, it is likely that many other traditionists attempted to establish chronological schemes, the impor-

⁴⁸Some exceptions: Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* (ed. Munajjid), I, 528 (← Ibn 'Ā'idh); al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2726 (← Abū Bakr ibn Ismā'il ibn Muḥammad ibn Sa'd); *ibid.*, I, 2799 (many informants); *ibid.*, I, 2800 (← Ibn Abī Mulayka); *ibid.*, I, 2894 (← 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far ← Ya'qūb ibn 'Utba). This compares with well over a hundred accounts in which al-Wāqidī cites no informant. See Jones, "The Chronology of the Maghāzī."

⁴⁹See, for example, his accounts on the chronology of 'Umar's death and burial, and 'Uthmān's accession date, followed by statement of length of 'Umar's reign; al-Tabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2726.

⁵⁰A few accounts in Khalīfa ibn Khayyāt's *Ta'rikh* date the beginnings of the mutiny against 'Uthmān, the battle of the Camel, etc.

tance of which may not be recognized because by chance few of their accounts have survived. For example, there exist a few chronological accounts from Abū Mikhnaf, Baqī ibn Makhlad, Qatāda, al-Walīd ibn Hishām, Yazīd ibn ‘Ubayda, etc. The work of all these traditionists contributed to a much more orderly chronology for the narratives of Islamic origins.

The application of *hijra* dating, however, although it did provide an absolute scale that was much more convenient for purposes of comparison than relative dating schemes, could not in itself resolve the innate chronological difficulties posed by many accounts and episodes; indeed, its introduction doubtless made some chronological contradictions obvious where they had not been before. Each of the scholars of the second/eighth century and later who concentrated on establishing the chronology of the events of early Islamic history in a systematic way eventually came to produce a somewhat different systematization. Not only was their personal judgment on the proper dating of a given episode bound to differ at times; they also frequently relied on different informants who conveyed to them divergent schemes of relative chronology, regnal lists, and the like. It is not surprising, therefore, that fairly frequent debates over dating and efforts to justify an assigned date crop up in the sources among the contextual traditions of these scholars. We find, for example, a contextual account in which al-Wāqidī argues against a reconstruction of events in Syria different from his own:

Abū Bakr died in AH 13, some days before the end of Jumādā II; Damascus was conquered in Rajab, AH 14. Now, is it possible that the Muslims did not know of his death at [the time of] the siege of Damascus, when fourteen months had elapsed between the two events? [In fact, news of] Abū Bakr’s death reached the Muslims at Fihl, before they marched to Marj al-Şuffar and before they invested Damascus; they besieged it for six months, minus one day. . . .⁵¹

Al-Wāqidī is clearly attempting to piece together many separate bits of chronological information, as well as the known substantive information

⁵¹Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, VIII, 755:14–26 (al-Wāqidī).

about the various events mentioned. In another account of similar kind, al-Wāqidī argues that “[the battle of] Ajnādayn was on Monday, twelve days before the end of Jumādā II [AH 13]. It is certain that Ajnādayn was in AH 13, for Abū Bakr was informed of it on his deathbed.”⁵²

Likewise, we find later compilers commenting on differences of opinion among predecessors, on whose chronological schemes they relied: as, for example, al-Ṭabarī, who in his chronicle notes that Abū ‘Ubayd al-Thaqaḥī was martyred at the battle of the Bridge in Iraq in AH 13 according to al-Wāqidī, whereas Ibn Ishāq dated the battle of the Bridge to AH 14.⁵³ Nor did such chronological disagreements affect only the events of the earliest years of Islamic history. Although events that took place later were much more securely fixed, since by the end of the first century relative chronological schemes were already being established, we do find evidence that establishing the absolute chronology of some later events could still pose problems. We thus find, for example, that al-Wāqidī dated the death of the rebel Zayd ibn ‘Alī to Ṣafar AH 121, whereas Ibn al-Kalbī dated it to Ṣafar AH 122.⁵⁴

The arduous process of working out plausible sequences for various events in the narratives of Islamic origins, and assignment of exact *hijra* dates to these events once a system of absolute dating by *hijra* years had been adopted, represented giant advances in the development of early Islamic historical writing. Despite significant limitations in the results, the establishment of clear (and generally accepted) chronological relationships in the origins narratives greatly enhanced their plausibility, and helped to make them that much more effective as a legitimizing device.

⁵²Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 483 (al-Wāqidī).

⁵³Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, I, 2156.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, II, 1668.

Appendix

TABLE OF NAMED YEARS

Listed below are a number of references in which years are identified by a particular event or description, "year of X," rather than by a numerical date. The list is by no means exhaustive; many further references (some of which may conflict with those already in the listing) are doubtless to be found. In some cases, it is not clear whether the phrase *sanat X* is actually evidence of a "named year" or merely a synchronism (e.g. under AH 4 below, the reference in Abū Zur'a to *sanat al-khandaq* may simply be a way of saying that the expulsion of Banū Qurayṣa took place in the same year as the battle of the Ditch, which a few lines earlier in the account had been dated to AH 4; the same applies to the reference to *sanat Khaybar* in AH 6). The existence, apparently, of several competing names for the same year (e.g. AH 11) is also problematic.

Events in the life of the Prophet and in the early conquest period are the ones over which different authorities are most likely to disagree. For events in the Prophet's life, references to other authorities' datings are found in Jones, "Chronology of the *Maghāzī*," 245–80, cited below as Jones, "Chronology." For the events of the conquest period, variant datings are found in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, cited below as "Donner, *Conquests*."

In the chart, year names given in square brackets are those for which the authority cited does not *explicitly* identify the named year with a *hijra* year. Question marks in the AH column indicate that the assignment of the named year to that date is not certain. Explanations in plain text are found in the references cited; those in italics are my own interpretations.

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
[<i>'ām al-fīl</i>] "Year of the Elephant"	—	
[<i>'ām al-fijār</i>] "Year of Fijār"	—	al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , I, 1253, 1255. Fijār was 20 years after the Year of the Elephant. <i>Named after battle of al-Fijār.</i>

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
[<i>sanat al-idhn bi-l-raḥīl</i>] ["Year of Permission to Travel"]	1	Al-Sakhāwī, <i>Al-I'lān bi-l-tawbīkh</i> , 82 (Rosenthal, <i>History of Muslim Historiography</i> , 384) Referring to Prophet's move from Mecca to Medina.
<i>sanat al-amr bi-l-qitāl</i> "Year of the Command to Fight"	2	Al-Sakhāwī, <i>Al-I'lān bi-l-tawbīkh</i> , 82 (Rosenthal, <i>History of Muslim Historiography</i> , 384). All authorities date Badr to AH 2 (Jones, "Chronology," 247).
<i>sanat al-tamḥīṣ</i> "Year of the Test" (or "Year of the Purification?")	3	Al-Sakhāwī, <i>Al-I'lān bi-l-tawbīkh</i> , 82 (Rosenthal, <i>History of Muslim Historiography</i> , 384). <i>Possibly referring to the battle of Uḥud as the "test"?</i> Virtually all authorities put Uḥud in AH 3 (Jones, "Chronology," 248).
<i>sanat al-khandaq</i> "Year of the Ditch"	4	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'rīkh</i> , 165 (no. 40: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal ← Mūsā ibn Dāwūd): al-Khandaq in year 4; Qurayẓa in <i>sanat al-khandaq</i> . <i>Authorities divided on whether khandaq was in AH 4 or 5</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 251).
—	5	—
<i>sanat Khaybar</i> ["Year of Khaybar"]	6?	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'rīkh</i> , 165 (no. 40: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal ← Mūsā ibn Dāwūd): Khaybar in year 6; al-Ḥudaybiya in <i>sanat Khaybar</i> .
[<i>'ām Khaybar</i>] ["Year of Khaybar"]	6?	Ibn Sayyid al-Kull, <i>Al-Anbā' al-mustaṭāba</i> , fol. 16r. <i>Not equated with a year.</i>
[<i>'ām Khaybar</i>]	6?	Mālik, <i>Muwaṭṭa'</i> , 42 (<i>Tahāra</i> 17). <i>Authorities divided on whether Khaybar was in AH 6 or first month of AH 7</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 254).

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
[<i>'ām al-Ḥudaybiya</i>] ["Year of al-Ḥudaybiya"]	6	Mālik, <i>Muwatta'</i> , 285 (<i>Hajj</i> 56), 300 (<i>Hajj</i> 104). All authorities place al-Ḥudaybiya encounter in AH 6 (Jones, "Chronology," 254).
<i>sanat al-kharṣ</i> "Year of Estimation"	7?	'Umar ibn Shabba, <i>Ta'riḫ al-Madīna al-Munawwara</i> , 179. <i>When the people of Khaybar allowed the Prophet's agent to estimate the 50% of crops due to Prophet. Cf. reports on 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa estimating crop of Khaybar</i> (Abū 'Ubayd, <i>Kitāb al-amwāl</i> , 651-52 nos. 1437, 1438, 1439; Ibn Ishāq, <i>Sīra</i> , 779). See remarks under AH 6.
[<i>'ām ghazwat Najd</i>] ["Year of the Raid on Najd"]	7?	Al-Nasā'ī, <i>Sunan</i> , III, 173 (<i>Ṣalāt al-khawf</i> 15); Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, <i>Musnad</i> (AH 1313 ed.), II, 320:14. (Jones, "Chronology," 254, lists a campaign to Najd led by Abū Bakr which al-Wāqidī dates to AH 7. However, the <i>ḥadīth</i> speaks of Prophet as present at this raid. Unclear.)
[<i>'ām al-qadīya</i>] ["Year of 'Umrāt al-Qadīya (or 'Umrāt al-Qaḍā') Raid"]	?	Al-Wāhidī, <i>Tafsīr al-basīṭ</i> , fol. 39r. <i>Al-Wāqidī, Ibn Ishāq, Mūsā ibn 'Uqba place 'Umrāt al-Qaḍā' raid in Dhū l-Qa'da</i> , AH 7 (Jones, "Chronology," 255).
[<i>'ām al-qadīya</i>]	7?	Mālik, <i>Muwatta'</i> , 285 (<i>Hajj</i> 56).
[<i>'ām al-fath</i>] ["Year of the Conquest"]	8	Mālik, <i>Muwatta'</i> , 239 (<i>Ṣiyām</i> 22-23). <i>Not equated with a year; all authorities put conquest of Mecca in AH 8</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 256).
[<i>'ām al-Ji'rāna</i>] ["Year of al-Ji'rāna"]	8?	Mālik, <i>Muwatta'</i> , 285 (<i>Hajj</i> 56). <i>Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidī date Ji'rāna to AH 8</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 257).

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
<i>sanat al-wufūd</i> "Year of Delegations"	9	Ibn Hishām, <i>Sīra</i> , 933. Named after numerous Arabian tribal delegations tendering submission to Muḥammad after conquest of Mecca.
[<i>‘ām Tabūk</i>] ["Year of Tabūk"]	9?	Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, <i>Musnad</i> (AH 1313 ed.), III, 41pu. <i>Most authorities put conquest of Tabūk in AH 9</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 257).
[<i>‘ām ḥijjat al-wadā’</i>] ["Year of the Farewell Pilgrimage"]	10	Mālik, <i>Muwatta’</i> , 279–80 (<i>Hajj</i> 35, 39, 40). <i>All authorities put farewell pilgrimage in AH 10</i> (Jones, "Chronology," 258).
<i>sanat al-tawba</i> "Year of Repentance"	11	Abū Zur’a, <i>Ta’rīkh</i> , 170–71 (nos. 50, 51: . . . al-Walīd ibn Muslim ← al-Umawī). AH 11 was the year in which God restored [the rebels of the <i>ridda</i>] to his grace (<i>tāba Allāh ‘alayhim</i>), i. e. in which they repented.
[<i>‘ām al-ridda</i>] ["Year of the Ridda"]	11?	Ibn Hishām, <i>Kitāb al-tijān</i> , 66.
[<i>‘ām al-Yamāma</i>] ["Year of al-Yamāma"]	12	Ibn al-Mubārak, <i>Kitāb al-jihād</i> , 101 (no. 117: ← Ibn Lahī’a ← Bukayr ibn al-Ash’ath ← Ibn ‘Umar) Not equated with a year; all authorities put conquest of al-Yamāma in AH 12.
[<i>‘ām Fiḥl</i>] ["Year of Fiḥl"]	13?	Ibn ‘Asākir, <i>Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq</i> , I (ed. Munajjid), 485. <i>Not equated with a year; conquest of Fiḥl dated to either 13 or 14 by various authorities</i> (Donner, <i>Conquests</i> , 128–42); <i>uncertain</i> .
—	14	See remarks under AH 13.

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
'ām al-Yarmūk "Year of al-Yarmūk"	15	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , 217 (no. 191: (← Ibn Lahī'a). <i>Ibn Ishāq, al-Wāqidi, Sa'īd ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz date Yarmūk to AH 15</i> (Donner, <i>Conquests</i> , 128–29); <i>Sayf's sources, al-Madā'inī, place it in AH 13</i> (Donner, <i>Conquests</i> , 134–35, 140, 141).
'ām al-Jābiya "Year of al-Jābiya"	16?	Ibn 'Asākir, <i>Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq</i> , XII, 709 (← al-Wāqidi). <i>Referring to 'Umar's visit to al-Jābiya, but some authorities place this in AH 16, some in AH 17</i> (Donner, <i>Conquests</i> , 151–52).
sanat Sargh "Year of Sargh"	17	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , 177–78 (no. 70: ← Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal). Sargh is a place between the Ḥijāz and Syria where the caliph 'Umar turned back because of plague in Syria.
'ām al-ramāda "Year of Ashes"	18	Al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , I, 2570. Referring to drought and famine. Khalifa ibn Khayyāt, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> (Najaf), I, 109.
—	—	—
'ām al-ru'āf "Year of the Nosebleed"	24	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , 184 (no. 87: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal); al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , I, 2799 (← Abū Ma'shar). According to Abū Ma'shar, referring to the fact that many people were afflicted with nosebleed during this year.
['ām 'aqurat al-dawābb] ["Year the Livestock were Barren"]	24?	Ibn 'Asākir, <i>Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq</i> (MS Leningrad), fol. 255v (← Ibn Ishāq).
—	—	—

NAMED YEAR	AH	REFERENCES AND COMMENTS
<i>sanat al-maḍīq</i> "Year of the Narrows"	32	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , 186 (no. 93). <i>Referring to Mu'āwiya's siege of the narrows at Constantinople.</i> (Cf. al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , I, 2889).
—	—	—
<i>sanat al-jamā'a</i> <i>'ām al-jamā'a</i> "Year of Coming Together"	40	Abū Zur'a, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , 188 (no. 101), 190 (no. 105: ← Abū Mushir); al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , I, 1920 (← Sayf). <i>Named after reunification of Muslim community when Iraqis recognized Mu'āwiya, marking end of First Civil War.</i>
—	—	—
[<i>'ām ḥajja Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān</i>] ["Year Mu'āwiya Made the <i>Ḥajj</i> "]	44?	Mālik, <i>Muwatta'</i> , 286 (<i>Ḥajj</i> 60). <i>Mu'āwiya led ḥajj in AH 44</i> (al-Ṭabarī, <i>Ta'riḫ</i> , II, 70).

CHAPTER 11

SOME FORMAL AND STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

The Ḥadīth Format

The majority of our information about Islamic origins in the Islamic sources is conveyed as historical reports (Ar. *akhbār*, sing. *khbar*), the texts (*matn*) of which are often quite short. Long *akhbār* certainly do exist, but the overwhelming majority of the extant information on Islamic origins is conveyed in accounts ranging from a few words to a half-page or so in length, a format that has been aptly termed “*khbar* history.”¹ The generally fragmented, almost atomistic quality of much of this material is one of its most distinctive qualities; it has been noted that this format sets early Islamic historical writing apart from most other early historiographical traditions, which usually tend to begin as connected narratives—sagas, epics, etc.²

In some cases, each short *khbar* is introduced by an *isnād* or chain of informants going back to an eyewitness or first informant. In such cases, of course, the *akhbār* have the same form as the traditional Islamic *ḥadīth* literature—the collected sayings of and reports about the

¹Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 66.

²Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 5, notes the atomistic quality of the Islamic tradition, with a concomitant loss of context and susceptibility to manipulation, and compares the Arabic tribal tradition's fragmentation with the more connected history and epic of the Icelandic sagas (*ibid.*, 8–9).

Prophet Muḥammad. Each is essentially a payload of substantive information linked to a critical apparatus (the *isnād*), whose function is to affirm, or perhaps to help us decide, the "truth value" of the information conveyed.³ We can call this the *ḥadīth* format.

The *ḥadīth* format—*akhbār* with validating *isnāds*—was borrowed by purveyors of historical accounts from the field of religious knowledge. We should pause here to remind ourselves that the pursuit of religious knowledge was far more important to the life of the early Muslim community than was the study of history, which in that day had no standing as a profession or field of study in its own right.⁴ Writing history was, in those times, a sideline, pursued by people whose main activity was something else: the study of religious knowledge (*ʿilm*), *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qurʾānic study, etc.—all of which were respected and recognized disciplines at which it was possible for some people, at least, to earn a living.⁵ The cultivation of religious knowledge (*ʿilm*, *fiqh*), on the other hand, was central to the early Islamic community's need to define the cultic, social, and ethical norms by which its members should live. As noted above, this process seems to have begun during the first century AH with the circulation of pious maxims and wise sayings of early Islamic "holy men." By the end of the first century, it was already usual to legitimize one's point of view on religious, cultic, or legal matters by attributing them to earlier religious authorities—revered early Muslims or, increasingly, the Prophet Muḥammad himself.⁶ The specialists in religious knowledge—particularly the *muḥaddithūn* or experts in the collection, scrutiny, and transmission of *ḥadīths*, or traditions conveyed from earlier authorities,

³On the development of historical consciousness in the Islamic community and its relation to the cultivation of *ḥadīth*, see above, 114–22.

⁴There are, for example, early Islamic biographical dictionaries of Companions of the Prophet, religious scholars, and physicians, but none of "historians" (*akhbārīyūn*), at least for the first four or five centuries. (The word *muʿarrikh*, which in modern Arabic means "historian," hardly occurs in early Islamic literature).

⁵Generally, we know little about the lives of the early *akhbārīyūn*, but to judge from the works attributed to them, a number of them seem to have purveyed also Prophetic traditions, genealogy, poetry, and other kinds of information; perhaps they were supported by their patrons as much for their ability to entertain as for anything else.

⁶Above, 119–20.

notably the Prophet—developed their discipline into a true science, replete with strict rules for procedure, sharp analytical categories, and an elaborate and precise technical terminology for categorizing and evaluating accounts.⁷

The strict *ḥadīth* format and the rigorous methods developed by the *muḥaddithūn* for evaluating reports were ultimately embraced by scholars interested in other kinds of material, such as Qur'ānic commentary, genealogy, and history. Their adoption of these forms and methods, however, was slow and often incomplete, and the *muḥaddithūn* remained the leaders in the practice of this methodology. Many scholars dealing with historical *akhbār* used the *ḥadīth* format loosely—for example, by giving with an account simply the name of their immediate informant, without demanding or including the names of earlier informants or of the ultimate source of the information as the *muḥaddithūn* would require, or by combining into one composite report information derived from several different informants. This is one reason why some of the leading figures in the elaboration of the early Islamic historiographical tradition are described as “weak” in the biographical dictionaries of scholars, which were constructed by, for, and about specialists in the science of *ḥadīth*.⁸ It also explains why many of the informants given in the *isnāds* of historical accounts are unknown to the biographical dictionaries; many were simply not students of *ḥadīth*.⁹

⁷Rosenthal, *Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*; Robson, “Tradition, the Second Foundation of Islam,” *idem*, “Tradition: Investigation and Classification,” *idem*, “The Material of Tradition,” *idem*, “The Isnād in Muslim Tradition,” *idem*, “The Form of Muslim Tradition.” On the historical content of *akhbār*, see Stefan Leder, “The Literary Use of the *Khabar*: a Basic Form of Historical Writing.”

⁸For example, al-Wāqidī and Sayf ibn ‘Umar are classified as “weak” or “renounced” in *ḥadīth*, known for passing forged traditions on the names of strong authorities, etc.: see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, IX, 363–68 (no. 604), for al-Wāqidī; *ibid.*, IV, 295–96 (no. 506), for Sayf. Ibn Ishāq gets a mixed review: *ibid.*, IX, 38–46 (no. 51). Al-Zuhri, by contrast, is uniformly praised for his extensive knowledge of *ḥadīth*: *ibid.*, IX, 445–51 (no. 732).

⁹Note, for example, that there appears to be no entry in Ibn Ḥajar’s *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* for Abū Mikhnaf, Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī, or ‘Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam. On this question, see Landau-Tasseron, “Processes of Redaction,” 253–70.

We see the partial or incomplete acceptance of the full rigor of the methods of the *ḥadīth* scholars in the overt structure and format of many of the surviving historical compilations of the second and third centuries AH. Al-Wāqidī's *Kitāb al-maghāzī* offers lengthy composite accounts of particular episodes, created by combining the reports of numerous informants into one synthetic narrative.¹⁰ The *Kitāb al-futūḥ* of Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī goes even further, apparently merging numerous reports derived from Ibn Ishāq and al-Wāqidī to create an unbroken narrative that covers the election of Abū Bakr, the *ridda* wars, and the early conquests under the caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.¹¹ The *Ta'rikh* of al-Ya'qūbī generally gives summary accounts of events with no *isnād* whatsoever, but this is because he explicitly states that he would relate only accounts that had found wide acceptance.

From the point of view of the *muḥaddithūn*, such works could only be considered *unscientific*—lacking in the full methodological rigor that had become demanded in the study of *ḥadīth*. It was the great achievement of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)—who, we must remember, was not first and foremost an historian or even a theologian, but rather a jurist well versed in the method of the *muḥaddithūn*—to finally apply this scientific method fully to the writing of history and to Qur'ān commentary, both of which were hitherto considered by the *muḥaddithūn* to be pursuits lacking methodological rigor.¹² In both his *Ta'rikh* and his *Tafsīr*, we see the *khbar* format applied with the strict attention to *isnāds* typical of the *muḥaddithūn*.

Strict application of the *ḥadīth* format to historical materials, however, sometimes caused compilers such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn 'Asākir to break up into shorter fragments some narratives that had originally been more unified. For, although many *akhbār* doubtless were originally short observations or brief anecdotes, some historical texts of

¹⁰On such combined reports, see below, 264–66.

¹¹The material covers all of vol. I and the first 147 pages of vol. II. The *isnād* is not found in the printed edition, but survives in MS 2290B of the Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, India, which is erroneously attributed to al-Wāqidī in the catalog (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, *Catalog*, XV, 108–10 [no. 1042]).

¹²Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*, 56 n. 1. Duri, *Rise of Historical Writing*, 69, notes that al-Ṭabarī's education and studies were juristic.

the second century AH appear to have been cast in the form of longer, connected narratives. Al-Ṭabarī's citations from the works of Sayf ibn 'Umar (d. ca. 184/800), for example, are sometimes quite lengthy, and comparison with citations of the same works by Ibn 'Asākir reveals that Sayf's original narrations must have been even longer, because in making their excerpts the two compilers have chosen to break the original narrative in different places.¹³ In this instance, at least—and perhaps in many others—a longer, more sustained narrative appears to have been broken into segments by al-Ṭabarī, so that he could present in the same place material from different informants on a single event. We can call this procedure FRAGMENTATION.¹⁴ Recent work on Abū Ismā'il al-Azdī al-Baṣrī's *Ta'rikh futūḥ al-Shām* has suggested that it may be a late second-century AH redaction of material that goes back to an older Syrian (Ḥimsī?) tradition, perhaps one assembled by Sa'īd ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tanūkhī (d. ca. 167/784).¹⁵ The presence of fairly long accounts in al-Azdī's version suggests that al-Tanūkhī's original text may have been one long narrative, or a series of relatively long ones. That early historical accounts may have been rather long narratives is perhaps confirmed by some papyrus fragments.¹⁶

At any rate, it seems plausible to assert that not all early writings on themes such as *nubūwa*, *umma*, *futūḥ*, or *fitna* were brief *akhbār*;

¹³The comparison also reveals that al-Ṭabarī omits much more of the poetry that was in Sayf's original text than does Ibn 'Asākir, a fact confirmed by recently published fragments of two works of Sayf, his *Kitāb al-ridda wa-l-futūḥ* and *Kitāb al-jamal wa-masīr 'Ā'isha wa-'Alī*. For a fuller examination of this question, see Donner, "Sayf ibn 'Umar's Accounts on the Conquest of Syria," (in preparation).

¹⁴Further examples of fragmentation: al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2925–26, cf. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 304:20–23; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2156–59, cf. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 485–88; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2110–13, cf. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 463, 464–65; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2150–55, 2147–48, cf. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 513–19; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2513–14, cf. Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 147.

¹⁵On this work, see Conrad, "Al-Azdī's History."

¹⁶Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, I, 65–99 (Documents 5 and 6—one on Muḥammad's campaigns, the other from Ibn Ishāq's *Ta'rikh al-khulafā'*. Despite this, Abbott herself views the short *khavar* as the origin of Arabic historiography (*ibid.*, I, 7, 9).

some may well have been lengthy narratives that have been lost in their original, connected form, and survive only in piecemeal excerpts.

Problems of Context

From the point of view of the modern historian, *khavar* history and the *ḥadīth* format can be recognized to have some advantages over more straightforward narrative traditions. The extensive use of *isnāds*—assuming one trusts the names in them as being, in fact, the transmitters of an account—gives the modern analyst some indication of the sources of particular bits of information, a matter at which one can often only guess in other traditions.¹⁷ Moreover, unlike a connected narrative, a collection of *akhbār* offers different, often contending, points of view on a given topic, which can sometimes help the modern historian understand something of the range of opinions and interests surrounding a particular issue in early Islamic society.

Khavar history also has definite limitations, however. The reliance on this form, with its clearly delimited textual units, lends the early Islamic historiographical tradition an atomistic quality, one consequence of which is that individual *akhbār* can sometimes become disassociated from their original historical context, either chronologically or geographically. Among the accounts of the conquest of Syria related by Ibn 'Asākir, for example, we find information on 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ' appointment as governor of various Qudā'a tribes, but this appears to be a misplaced report of 'Amr's appointment some years earlier, under the first caliph, Abū Bakr, before the conquest of Syria.¹⁸ Similarly, we find an account of the famous "desert march" of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd from Iraq to Syria that describes it in much the same manner as other accounts, but that places it on his way from al-Yamāma to Iraq.¹⁹

¹⁷Old Testament scholars, for example, have struggled for over a century to establish the origins of particular bits of the Old Testament canon.

¹⁸Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 446 (Ibn Sa'd ← 'Abd al-Hamīd ibn Ja'far ← his father); compare the account in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 1962–63 (Sayf ← al-Ṣa'b ibn 'Atīya ibn Bilāl ← Sahm ibn Minjāb ← Minjāb ibn Rāshid), and Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 304 n. 46.

¹⁹The account is in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 508–509 (← Abū 'Uthmān al-Ṣan'ānī). For a review of accounts of the "desert march" see Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 119–27. A further case of ap-

The misplacement of brief contextual accounts also occurred; for example, in one instance we find the very same account on the dates of the siege and treaty with a town, conveyed from the same authorities, attached by one compiler to the conquest of Damascus, and by another to the conquest of Fiḥl (Pella) in Jordan.²⁰

The compilers of the second and third centuries AH sometimes explicitly recognized the possibility of misplacement of material. In describing the conquest of al-Ubulla (Apologos) in southern Iraq, for example, al-Ṭabarī conveys traditions stating that it was conquered by Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, but he notes that in his opinion the city was only conquered in later campaigning by 'Utba ibn Ghazwān and that accounts ascribing the conquest to Khālīd were really descriptions of 'Utba's conquest misplaced in the context of Khālīd's activities.²¹ Similarly, al-Balādhurī discusses one version of the conquest of Iṣbahān, and then adds: "Muḥammad ibn Sa'd said: 'I think [this account] is about the people of Qum.'" ²² Sometimes we encounter a report that highlights how a personal reminiscence sometimes became mixed up in the memory of the person who heard it from the eyewitness. Abū Zakariyā al-Azdī, while discussing governors of Iraq for the caliph Yazīd (II) ibn 'Abd al-Malik (ruled 101–105/720–24) in 102 AH, reports the following: "Muḥsin ibn Mu'āfi ibn Ṭāwūs reported from his grandfather, from his [great-grand] father, who said: 'Umar ibn Hubayra was appointed governor of Mosul.' I called on him and he told a story about which I had doubts. I don't know whether he said 'Umar ibn Hubayra or Harthama ibn A'yan."²³ Such confusions, which are due in no small measure to the prevalence of the *khavar* format, were a prime cause of the extensive chronological difficulties in early Islamic historiography, discussed in the preceding chapter.

parent misplacement is noted in Donner, *Early Islamic Conquests*, 307 n. 113. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 2865–66, where the sentence about Mu'āwiya's garrisoning Qinnasrīn with Iraqis appears to be misplaced from accounts of his caliphate.

²⁰Khalīfa, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 112–13 (← Bakr ibn 'Aṭīya), linked to Fiḥl; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 496, linked to Damascus.

²¹Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, I, 2025–26.

²²Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 312 bottom.

²³Al-Azdī, *Ta'riḫ al-Mawṣil*, 16. 'Umar ibn Hubayra was governor of Mosul in AH 102; Harthama, in AH 183–84.

More generally, the fact that each *khavar* was (or could be) a free-standing textual unit meant that the sense of cause and effect between two events or episodes was often left unarticulated, which weakened the sense of larger historical relationships.²⁴ When historical causation is portrayed, it is often depicted as the product of a single episode resulting in a crucial individual decision by a central actor, a procedure that often trivializes momentous developments. A perfect example of this is the report in al-Balādhurī's *Futūḥ al-buldān* which makes the Arabization of the Umayyad bureaucracy the result of 'Abd al-Malik's pique at a Greek scribe who, according to the report, urinated in an inkwell when he could find no water.²⁵ The atomistic quality of *khavar* history and consequent weak development of any understanding of broad relations of historical causation may also have reinforced a tendency, which as we have seen was strong in the Islamic community from the outset, to view events as mirrors of the moral qualities of the person or people involved.²⁶ Reading through the hundreds of accounts about the caliph Mu'āwīya, for example, or 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, one senses lurking in the background of virtually every one the yardstick of moral evaluation (linked, of course, to their contending claims to the caliphate), but even after reading the whole corpus of material one can only with great difficulty discern with confidence what we might call a policy of their conduct of state.²⁷

The compilers of the late second and third centuries AH, in whose collections we find the greatest number of *akhbār* of interest to us, solved (or took advantage of?) the relatively weak narrative cohesion of the masses of *akhbār* by selecting out of the available material only those accounts that were of interest to them, and organizing them according to a variety of schemes that were, in many cases, essentially unrelated to the individual *akhbār* themselves: by chronology or date (*ta'rikh*—which, incidentally, was usually less disruptive of any surviving sense of larger causation and relationships), or by genealogy (as

²⁴Rosenthal, *History of Muslim Historiography*, 66; Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 7.

²⁵Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, 193. Cf. Noth/Conrad, 188–89, where this is used as an example of a "pseudo-cause;" this example does not occur in Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*.

²⁶See above, Chapter 2.

²⁷As we noted above, even the chronology of events is often uncertain.

in al-Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashraf*), geographical region, individual (as in biographical dictionaries), etc. Consequently, one frequently finds the same account in two or more collections, surrounded by completely different accounts in each case—a fact that highlights the decontextualized nature of most *akhbār*, and suggests the possible danger inherent in unwittingly letting the tone of accounts surrounding the one in which we are interested color our perception of it, except insofar as it helps us to understand the intentions of the compilation itself.

Problems of Transmission

Although the ideal of the rigorous method of the *muḥaddithūn* was absolute fidelity to the text of an account one learned from one's informant, the transmission of *akhbār* from one scholar or compilation to another sometimes resulted in distortion of the text. Some distortions crept in for entirely unintended reasons: scribal errors in reading were not uncommon, indeed, in view of the fact that many texts were written without diacritical dots, the general absence of any markers for short vowels, and the difficulty of reading some scribes' handwriting, one can expect them to have been quite frequent.

At other times, texts became distorted because of intentional changes made for a variety of reasons. Occasionally, an unscrupulous transmitter may have wished to alter the record; but much more common were distortions introduced for more innocent reasons. Lengthy historical accounts, especially, were sometimes subjected to COMPRESSION or EXPANSION. In compression, an account is summarized or otherwise reduced in bulk by transmitters who were interested only in the general point of an account, or in one particular aspect or detail of it.²⁸ In expansion, a narrative is filled out with additional material introduced by later transmitters. Moreover, the two processes are not mutually exclusive; a single account can be compressed in some respects, and expanded in others, by one or several transmitters. The kind of distortions introduced by these processes can be readily imagined, and are best seen by comparing a fuller version of an account

²⁸The summarization of longer accounts in order to eliminate material not deemed of interest to a later transmitter has been examined in the context of *ḥadīth* in Zaman, *The Evolution of a Ḥadīth*, 146–82. A similar case has been made in Lecker, "The Death of the Prophet Muḥammad's Father."

with one of its shorter summaries. An example is provided by an account in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* that gives an overview of the conquests of Fīhl and Damascus by the Muslim armies, led by Khālīd ibn al-Walīd; Ibn 'Asākir's *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* contains a shorter version of the same account.²⁹ Comparison shows that the shorter version covers only the second part of the longer account, and offers a briefer version of that, but it is not immediately clear whether the shorter version is an abbreviation of the longer, or whether the longer was created from the shorter by inserting extraneous material (expansion). Whether we see it as a case of compression or expansion, however, the process almost inevitably distorts the picture. For example, the information on the Byzantines and their actions, so prominent in the version in al-Ṭabarī, is entirely missing from the version in Ibn 'Asākir, either because the latter's transmitters were not interested in that aspect of the story, or because al-Ṭabarī's transmitters injected this material into an original narrative that did not feature it. Ibn 'Asākir says that Khālīd was "in charge of the army" (*'alā l-nās*), whereas the al-Ṭabarī version says only that he was "in charge of the vanguard of the army" (*'alā muqaddimat al-nās*). Most interesting, perhaps, is the presence in al-Ṭabarī's version of much material belonging to the *ṣulḥ*-*'anwa* debate on taxation;³⁰ this information appears to represent the injection of later material into an earlier text by transmitters who were concerned with this issue.

Another procedure that inevitably produced much distortion was the conflation of several originally separate reports to form one, which we can call a *combined* or *synthetic* report.³¹ This process was quite

²⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 2145–47 (Ibn Ishāq); Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 495 (Ibn Ishāq). A full translation and comparison of these accounts is provided as an Appendix to this chapter.

³⁰ See above, 171–73.

³¹ In much of the literature on Arabic historiography this procedure is referred to under the heading "collective *isnād*" ("Sammelisnād"). The use of this term is understandable, because it is in the *isnād* for the composite report, which shows the names of the various informants whose accounts have been combined, that one sees the telltale evidence of the process of synthesis. However, the term "collective *isnād*" draws our attention to the *isnād* and away from the *matn*, and so tends to play down what I take to be the central fact, that it is *the texts of diverse accounts* that have been combined. For this reason, a term like "synthetic account"

common in the transmission of historical *akhbār*, and was used by scholars as early as al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), if not earlier.³² An example is al-Wāqidī's combined report about the battle of Hunayn, which he opens by listing the names of eleven informants:³³

... each of whom related to me a part [of the story], and others who related [accounts] to me on the authority of informants whom I have not named, reliable people; each of them related part of this story (*ḥadīth*), some knowing more than others about it (*ba'duhum aw'ā lahu min ba'din*), and I combined all of what they told me about it.³⁴

In some cases, the compiler relates a version of the story on which all his informants agree, indicating as he goes along when a particular informant differs from the consensus on a specific point.³⁵

The blending of material from different informants to form combined reports naturally complicates our efforts to fathom the points of view and peculiarities of individual informants. The fact that the creation of synthetic or combined reports continued to be practiced for many generations, moreover, means that we often find material of relatively early origin juxtaposed within one and the same report with material of much later origin. Sometimes, for example, a narrative of

or "combined report" seems preferable. For a recent study of this phenomenon, see Lecker, "Wāqidī's Account of the Status of the Jews of Medina."

³²Fück, "Die Rolle des Traditionalismus in Islam," 16.

³³For the record, the eleven named authorities are Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh, 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far, Ibn Abī Sabra, Muḥammad ibn Šāliḥ, Abū Ma'shar, Ibn Abī Ḥabība, Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Sahl, 'Abd al-Šamad ibn Muḥammad al-Sa'dī, Mu'adh ibn Muḥammad, Bukayr ibn Mismār, and Yaḥyā ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Qatāda.

³⁴Al-Wāqidī, *Maghāzī*, 885. See also Lecker, "Wāqidī's Account of the Status of the Jews of Medina." Another example, with almost the same phrasing used in the opening, is al-Zuhri's combined report about the famous "affair of the lie" involving the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha, which is constructed by al-Zuhri from information provided to him by 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, Sa'd ibn al-Musayyab, 'Alqama ibn Waqqās, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Utba, all relating it from 'Ā'isha herself: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, V, 55–60, an exceptionally long account for al-Bukhārī's collection.

³⁵E.g. al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, IVA, 47, on the siege of Mecca during the Second Civil War.

relatively early origin is fitted out with editorial glosses or clarifications (such as a date or topographical note) by a later transmitter. In the account attributed to Ibn Ishāq about Fihl and Damascus translated in the Appendix to this chapter, for example, we see both a dating and an inserted topographical gloss; knowing Ibn Ishāq's concern for chronology, it seems likely that he himself is responsible for the dates, which he added to older materials he used to construct his report (unfortunately, the accounts' *isnāds* do not tell us who his authorities might have been). The topographical gloss, on the other hand, may have been added by later transmitters of Ibn Ishāq's account, perhaps by the same persons who were so interested in establishing taxation precedents according to the *ṣulh*-*'anwa* typology.

Topoi and Schematizations³⁶

Another consequence of the atomizing quality of the *khbar* format is that it facilitated the proliferation of *topoi* or literary commonplaces.³⁷ Since consistency of prose style and content in a given informant's *akhbār* was masked by the fragmentation of his material into many small bits, it was a relatively easy matter to add to an existing account a *topos* whose intent was the advancement of some religious or political cause, or merely literary embellishment. In the most extreme case, there arose what Noth has termed "undifferentiated reports"³⁸ consisting of nothing more than one or several *topoi*, with no ascertainable historical content at all other than the historical context used to frame them.³⁹

³⁶The pioneering works on this topic are Stetter, *Topoi und Schemata im Hadīṭ*, and especially Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 101–92; Noth/Conrad, 109–218. Noth's work retains its validity, for the most part, and I shall not attempt to rework this subject extensively here; the present comments are merely minor adjustments on his observations. See also several articles on particular *topoi* by Conrad, including "Historical Evidence and the Archaeology of Early Islam" and "Seven and the *Tasbī'*."

³⁷The word *topos* (pl. *topoi*) is short for the Greek phrase *topos koinos*, "common place."

³⁸In the original German, "Indifferente Berichte." See Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien*, 182–92; Noth/Conrad, 204–18.

³⁹See the discussion of "historicization" and the principle of "verisimilitude in counterfeiting" above, 209–14.

We should not, however, conclude from this observation that every frequently encountered turn of phrase, or every description of a similar situation in different contexts, is merely a literary *topos* and should be summarily rejected as historical evidence. As Noth has pointed out, there are not only literary *topoi*, but also "*topoi* of life"—events and actions that are themselves commonplace, such as the rising of the sun in the morning, eating an evening meal, going to bed at night, etc.⁴⁰ Obviously, the recurrent description in different *akhbār* of one or another of these does not mean the accounts are spurious. Moreover, this may be true even when very specific words or phrases are used in different accounts to describe such commonplace events.⁴¹

Yet, there can be little doubt that literary *topoi* do abound in the narratives of Islamic origins. A comprehensive catalog of such *topoi* would be a most valuable aid in studying these narratives, but little further work on this task has been undertaken since Noth's preliminary listing. It is important to note that most literary *topoi* are not ideologically neutral or used simply to add stylistic or dramatic embellishment to an otherwise drab account—although they may, of course, do that. Rather, *topoi* usually reinforce a particular moral, religious, or

⁴⁰This distinction was made clearly by Noth in a lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in March 1988, in Chicago, and should appear in the published form of that paper, "The *Ṣaḥāba* Topos." It is mentioned, though less explicitly, in Noth/Conrad, 109 ("A topos may very well have a basis in fact. . ."), 144–45.

⁴¹Noth, for example, presents use of the phrase *wa. . . 'alā*, "and. . . upon/over," in *futūḥ* accounts to designate the commander of certain kinds of military units as a literary *topos* (*Quellenkritische Studien*, 101–105; Noth/Conrad, 111–14). His analysis implies that although the use of such a phrase may originally have been rooted in an actual historical fact, the designation became transportable as a literary *topos*, so that in most accounts where the phrase is used it is of dubious historicity. We would not, however, conclude that repeated use in the American press of the commonplace phrase "President X today signed into law a bill. . ." was merely a literary *topos*, and on that basis question the historicity of the events reported. The use of the *wa. . . 'alā* form does not, of course, confirm the accuracy of the information, either; Noth has shown too many dubious cases. In other words, the question of whether the informant of an account could have known the identity of the commanders named is a matter that must be decided on grounds *other than* the form of the account itself.

political point of view,⁴² and identifying the motivations underlying a *topos* should be an important part of the task of creating a comprehensive catalog of them. Given the importance in Islamic historiography of the issues of Prophecy, Community, Hegemony, and Leadership, we may suggest that a *topos* will emerge only when a consensus has developed on a particular aspect of one of those issues, the *topos* itself being a distilled narrative expression of that consensus. In other words, *topoi* will not circulate about issues that remain controversial; for opinions that are controversial cannot be commonplace. This means that the emergence of *topoi* is, in terms of the coalescence of the historiographical tradition as a whole, relatively late. A few examples will clarify this point.

Two accounts that describe strikingly similar plots by Jews to poison Muḥammad and Abū Bakr may reflect a *topos* emanating from a period of tension between the Jewish and early Islamic communities. The first tells how the wife of a Jewish leader at Khaybar tried to kill Muḥammad by serving him a poisoned roast lamb.⁴³ His table-mate died; Muḥammad survived, but some accounts say his death years later was due to lingering effects of the poison.⁴⁴ Another story tells how Abū Bakr and al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada are poisoned while eating with a slow-acting poison that kills both within a year. The poison is attributed to the Jews, and the parallel with Muḥammad's case explicitly pointed out.⁴⁵ Although the possibility that two incidents of this kind could actually have taken place should not be dismissed out of hand, several facts suggest that we are dealing with a literary invention rather than an

⁴²Noth points this out, categorizing most *topoi* he has identified into several groups: *topoi* concerned with personal names; *topoi* emphasizing feats of arms; *topoi* that serve to glorify former times; the summons to Islam as *topos*; and several with "no recognizable coherent tendency" (Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien* 101-54; Noth/Conrad, 109-72).

⁴³Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 764-65; = Guillaume, *Life of Muḥammad*, 516; Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, II.2, 6-8.

⁴⁴E.g. Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, *Al-'Iqd al-farīd*, V, 15 (al-Layth ibn Sa'd ← al-Zuhri).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, V, 15; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 2127-28 (Abū Zayd ['Umar ibn Shabba] ← 'Alī ibn Muḥammad [al-Madā'inī] ← Abū Ma'shar, Yazīd ibn 'Iyād ibn Ju'duba, Abū 'Ubayda ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī 'Ubayda, Ghassān ibn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Juwayriya ibn Asmā', from Iraqi and Syrian authorities. See *ibid.*, I, 1976 for full *isnād*).

historical event. In both instances the intended victims died long after the supposed poisoning. In neither case is the identity of the supposed perpetrators very convincing: in Abū Bakr's case they are identified only as "Jews," in Muḥammad's case the act is supposedly the work of a Jewish widow, but her identity is not further defined. In neither case is there record of any retribution being visited upon the supposed perpetrators; in Muḥammad's case, some accounts present the woman's defense—that she was testing to see whether he was truly a prophet or merely a tyrant—as gaining her a pardon.⁴⁶ None of this makes the accounts particularly convincing as reports of actual events; the rather indiscriminately anti-Jewish nature of the accounts suggests, rather, a literary *topos* growing out of the issue of Community that found currency perhaps during the last years of the first century AH, when the Believers were intent on defining their identity as Muslims by establishing decisive barriers between themselves and the Jewish and Christian communities.

Another example is what can be called the "two brothers *topos*." Such accounts portray a supposed episode in a military confrontation between two groups of Muslims, during which one combatant discovers that the opponent he is just about to take on in single combat—or whom he has just killed or mortally wounded—is his own brother.⁴⁷ While it is possible that these events happened as described, it seems more likely that they represent narrative devices whose ultimate purpose is both to enliven the account with a gripping story, and to underline the horror of civil war—thereby emphasizing the point that the Muslim community should be politically unified, an important aspect of the issue of Leadership.

A third example of a *topos* involves events supposedly taking place before or on the eve of the Islamic conquests that serve as omens of the

⁴⁶The Ibn Hishām account. Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, II.2, 7, has a short additional account that reports that Muḥammad had the woman killed for trying to poison him, but the account looks like an afterthought.

⁴⁷E.g. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, I, 3284–85 (at the battle of Siffin); Ibn Abī l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha*, II, 12–13 (during Busr ibn Arṭāt's campaign in the Ḥijāz on behalf of Mu'āwīya). A variant has a father and his son as the two protagonists, e.g. al-Dīnawarī, *Al-Akhbār al-tiwāl*, 173. (I am grateful to Dr. Tayeb El-Hibri for providing this reference.)

Muslims' eventual domination in a given area—particularly instances where some figure who, for one reason or another, can stand as an icon of the future Muslim-Arabian regime takes possession of something that symbolizes the change of hegemony. One such account is the report, mentioned above, in which the Sasanian king hands a clod of earth over to the Muslim envoys.⁴⁸ Similar is the story describing how the eventual conqueror of Egypt, 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, visited Alexandria before the rise of Islam in order to engage in commerce. While there, 'Amr—although obviously an outsider—somehow finds himself at a ceremony in which the Alexandrian nobles compete to catch a golden ball tossed into the air, the idea being that whoever did so would be the future ruler of Egypt. Of course, it is 'Amr who catches the ball, much to the outrage of the Alexandrian nobility: "Should this bedouin rule us?"⁴⁹ The intrinsic unlikelihood of this scenario—in which the Alexandrian nobility decide grave political questions in the manner of so many maids of honor springing for the bridal bouquet—and the transparently symbolic character of the account immediately betray the legendary nature of the report. In both of these instances, and many others, we are clearly dealing with a fabricated and highly improbable report historicized by placing it into what was deemed a plausible historical context—in the first instance the Islamic conquest of Iraq, in the second 'Amr's pre-Islamic visits to Egypt. Moreover, both instances reflect the concerns of the issue of Hegemony to demonstrate the divine nature of the Muslims' eventual domination of non-Muslims—in this case through divine omens, rather than through the description of the Muslims' actual (and divinely aided) success on the battlefield, as in the *futūḥ* theme.

Finally, we may note the existence of whole groups of *topoi* whose purpose is to stress the piety of the protagonists; they thus represent a hybridization of pious legitimation and historicizing legitimation, in that they present this piety in narrative form. Interestingly, such accounts can often be used not only to show the piety of the Believers in contrast to the non-Believers, but also to highlight the piety of one group of Believers against another, a device especially dear to "sectarian" groups when making their case against the majority of the commu-

⁴⁸See above, 178.

⁴⁹Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 53–55 (← 'Uthmān ibn Ṣāliḥ).

nity. One form of such accounts has the enemy's spies report that the protagonists are "soldiers by day and monks by night," i.e. that they fight savagely on the battlefield, and spend the night in prayer and religious exercises.⁵⁰ Another version depicts the protagonist performing prayers just before being executed by the enemy; the captive performs only two *rak'as*, and then declares himself ready to face death, saying: "If it weren't that you (i.e. the executioners) would believe me simply to be trying to delay death, I would have done more *rak'as*."⁵¹

Pervasive problems of context and of transmission such as these were the product of the fact that *khavar* history became, apparently under the influence of the science of *ḥadīth*, the dominant form in early Islamic historical writing.

⁵⁰Such accounts are quite common among the narratives of the early Islamic conquests. An especially interesting example, placed in the context of rivalry between different kinds of Muslims, is found in an Ibādī Khārijite source; it has the spies of the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Manṣūr making such a report to him regarding the forces of the Ibādī leader Abū l-Khaṭṭāb in North Africa: Abū Zakarīyā al-Warjalānī, *Chronique*, 34–35.

⁵¹Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* (ed. Wüstenfeld), 641, on the execution of Khubayb ibn 'Adī by Meccan polytheists during the al-Rajī' episode; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 116, 141, both dealing with the execution of the proto-Shī'ī rebel Ḥujr ibn 'Adī by Mu'āwīya.

Appendix

IBN ISHĀQ'S ACCOUNT OF THE
CONQUEST OF FIHL AND DAMASCUS

The account translated below is that found in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, I, 2145–47 and, in shorter form, in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq*, I (ed. Munajjid), 495. The two *isnāds*, given below, indicate that transmission diverged immediately after Ibn Ishāq:

Al-Ṭabarī's *isnād*: Ibn Ḥumayd ← Salama ← Ibn Ishāq.

Ibn 'Asākir's *isnād*: a) Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Ḥamza al-Sulamī ← Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Thābit ←, and b) Abū l-Qāsim ibn al-Samarqandī ← Abū Bakr ibn al-Ṭabarī ←, both branches relating from ← Abū l-Ḥusayn ibn al-Faḍl ← 'Abd Allāh ibn Ja'far ← Ya'qūb ← Ḥāmid ibn Yaḥyā ← Ṣadaqa, i.e. Ibn Sābiq ← Muḥammad ibn Ishāq.

The following conventions are used in the translation: text in roman type represents passages that occur only in al-Ṭabarī's version; text in *sans serif* represents passages that are common to both al-Ṭabarī's and Ibn 'Asākir's versions; text in *italic* represents passages or words found only in Ibn 'Asākir's version. A few additions to clarify the text are added in square brackets. Arabic words of special interest are indicated in footnotes.

TRANSLATION

When the Muslims were done with Ajnādayn, they marched to Fiḥl in the territory of al-Urdunn. In it had gathered the scattered remnants⁵² of the Byzantines, while the Muslims were under their commanders and Khālīd was in the vanguard of the army.⁵³ When the Byzantines

⁵² *al-rāfiḍa*.

⁵³ *fī muqaddimat al-nās*.

encamped at Baysān they made its rivers overflow⁵⁴ (?), and, being low-lying terrain, it became mud, and they encamped at Fiḥl—Baysān is between Filastīn and al-Urdunn—so when the Muslims advanced on it unawares of what the Byzantines had done, their horses became mired down in the mud, and they met with great hardship in it. Then God delivered them—Baysān is called “Place of Mire”⁵⁵ because of what the Muslims encountered there—then they rushed upon the Byzantines while they were in Fiḥl. They did battle and the Byzantines were routed. The Muslims entered Fiḥl, and the scattered remnants of the Byzantines reached Damascus. Fiḥl was in [the month of] Dhū l-Qa‘da, year 13, six months after ‘Umar’s [accession to the] caliphate. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf undertook leading the people on that pilgrimage. Then they marched to Damascus, Khālid in the vanguard of [Ibn ‘Asākir: *over*] the army. In Damascus, the Byzantines had gathered to one of their men called Bāhān. [Meanwhile] ‘Umar had dismissed Khālid ibn al-Walīd and appointed Abū ‘Ubayda over all the army. Then the Muslims and Byzantines met in the area around Damascus, and fought intensely; then God destroyed the Byzantines. The Muslims smote some of them and the Byzantines entered Damascus and closed its gates. The Muslims hovered over it⁵⁶ and besieged it until Damascus was conquered [Ibn ‘Asākir: *until God conquered D.*] and they gave tribute.⁵⁷ The letter appointing Abū ‘Ubayda and dismissing Khālid came to him, but Abū ‘Ubayda was embarrassed to read the letter to Khālid until Damascus was conquered, so the treaty⁵⁸ was executed under Khālid’s hands, and the document written in his name. After Damascus had received its treaty, Bāhān—the chief of the Byzantines who had fought the Muslims—reached [the Byzantine emperor] Heraclius. The conquest of Damascus was in the year 14, in [the month of] Rajab; Abū ‘Ubayda made public his appointment to command and the dismissal of Khālid. The Muslims had met, they and the Byzantines, at a town called ‘Ayn Fiḥl between Filastīn and al-Urdunn, and they fought intensely in it; then

⁵⁴*bathaḡū anḥārahā* (?). *Bathaḡa* is usually intransitive, “to overflow” (of rivers). Perhaps the form *baththaḡū* (II) is intended?

⁵⁵*dhāt al-radgha*.

⁵⁶*wa-jathama l-muslimūn ‘alayhā*. Perhaps, more literally, “perched over it.”

⁵⁷*jizya*.

⁵⁸*al-ṣulḥ*.

the Byzantines reached Damascus. *Then Abū ‘Ubayda spent a little of the winter (?) (in [one] copy, his waterskin (?)) in Damascus.*⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *thumma shatā abū ‘ubaydata shutaytatan (?) wa-fī nuskhatin shannatahu (?) bi-dimashqa.* // The text is confused; the word *shutayta* does not appear in the dictionaries, although its meaning is obvious; *shanna*, offered as a variant by Ibn ‘Asākir or one of his informants, is known but offers no satisfactory meaning; the manuscripts of Ibn ‘Asākir offer yet other readings, all problematic.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSIONS

An Overview of the Growth of Early Islamic Historiography

In the Introduction, we reviewed various approaches to the sources for Islamic origins, and cast a particularly critical eye on the most recent of these, what I have termed the skeptical approach. That critique offered a number of reasons for rejecting the skeptical approach, and suggested that what I have termed the tradition-critical approach appears to offer the best hope for sorting the wheat from the chaff in the early Islamic historiographical tradition. We noted at that time, however, that a convincing explanation and description of just why and how the extant narratives of Islamic origin came into existence was still wanting—and in the absence of a relatively clear and cogent picture of this process, the skeptical school, with its sweeping claim to have detected the wholesale rewriting of the history of Islamic origins by later tradition, would still have some appeal. The main objectives of the present work have been to situate the beginnings of historical writing in the Islamic community in its proper historical context (undertaken in Part I), and to provide some basis for understanding why the narratives of Islamic origin we have before us look the way they do (the task of Part II).

We can summarize our view of the emergence of historical writing in the early Islamic community as follows, drawing on the particular points discussed in the preceding chapters.

THE PRE-HISTORICIST PHASE (TO CA. 50 AH)

The community of Believers, preoccupied with issues of piety and living in accordance with the revealed Law (or with extra-Islamic concerns such as genealogy), lacked a properly historical vision of itself and had not yet clearly formulated historical questions related to its own self-conception. Individuals defined themselves simply as "Believers" (*mu'minūn*)—that is, they defined themselves by standards of piety and as part of a pietist movement—or according to "tribal" (i.e. extra-Islamic) conventions; they did not yet define themselves as members of a community defined historically, that is, by reference to specific historical events. Raw information about the recent past (including the life of Muḥammad, etc.) was available to the Believers during this phase in the form of personal memories or as incidental or contextual information embedded in stories that were related for moral, genealogical, or other purposes. These personal memories, however, tended to be quite evanescent; as long as they were not linked to some framework (pietistic, genealogical, lexicographical) that made them worth remembering by others, they were in danger of simply being forgotten as their witnesses died off. The raw information about the past that *was* embedded in pietistic or lexicographical or genealogical accounts, on the other hand, had a certain longevity, since there were reasons to preserve and circulate such information further: to provide instruction in and affirmation of pious attitudes, to clarify a passage of the Qur'ān, or to establish, in tribal terms, the claim of one's tribe or family to noble status. Many of these accounts were probably quite brief. Those intended to clarify passages in the Qur'ān were eventually taken up in commentaries and by those relating material bearing on the historiographical theme of Qur'ān-related narratives, when it developed. Those accounts with mainly tribal content contributed eventually to the historiographical theme of pre-Islamic Arabia.

THE PROTO-HISTORICIST PHASE (CA. 25 AH TO CA. 100 AH)

During the first century AH, political and theological issues emerged that affected the community of Believers in various ways and generated

the first truly historical concerns in the community. As the Believers expanded their presence and hegemony outside Arabia starting in the 630s and 640s CE (20s and 30s AH), they came into increasingly close contact with well-established monotheist communities, particularly those of Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. At first, there may have been a period of accommodation and symbiosis between the Believers and the Jews, Christians, and even, perhaps, Zoroastrians of the region, although this is only dimly visible in our sources.¹ With time, however, this apparent symbiosis began to give way. Believers challenged the Christian concept of the Trinity as a dilution of the notion of strict monotheism.² For their part, some Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians of the Near East, well-versed as they were in monotheist theology and in the traditions of prophecy and revealed scriptures, began to raise questions about the Believers' origins and the authority of their message. Granted the validity of the notions of One God, the Last Judgment, and prophecy, how could the Believers be sure that Muḥammad had been a true prophet, or that the Qur'ān and its laws were truly revelations from God? Why was the Qur'ān at odds in many places with the Jews' and Christians' own scriptures?³ The result of these debates was that the broader identity as Believers gradually gave way to a more sharply defined identity as Muslims, that is, as confessionally separate from Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. The distinctive markers of this new confessional identity were acceptance of the Qur'ān as their scripture and Muḥammad as their Prophet. The debates over the relationship of Believers/Muslims to non-Muslims, the relationship of Muḥammad to other prophets, and the veracity of his claim to be a prophet, generated several of the early historiographical themes we have studied above: *nubūwa*, which focused on demonstrating Muḥammad's status as Prophet; *umma*, which focused on the origins of the com-

¹Further work is needed on this possible symbiosis; a beginning is made in Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*. For a fuller exposition of the evolution described in this paragraph, see Donner, "From Believers to Muslims."

²This challenge is visible in documentary form in the inscriptions of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. See Busse, "Monotheismus und islamische Christologie."

³Evidence of these questions is visible in some of the Christian polemics of the late first and early second centuries AH. See especially Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam."

munity of Believers under Muḥammad's leadership; and *futūḥ*, which concentrated on narratives explaining the divinely aided nature of the Muslims' hegemony over non-Muslim communities. We can suggest, tentatively, that the Umayyad caliphs took a major role in encouraging the collection and recording of information on these themes; as rulers of the community of Believers, it was in their own interest to foster the legitimist claims of the community as a whole against its rivals.

The early contacts with Christians and Jews, in particular, made available to the Believers much information about some figures mentioned in the Qur'ān, which was of interest especially to those pious persons who studied the sacred text closely. This material, along with historical information related in Qur'ānic glosses of the pre-historicist phase, formed the basis of the theme we have called "Qur'ān-related narratives." As a historiographical theme, Qur'ān-related narratives were probably first elaborated among the diffuse group of pious people who were knowledgeable about the Qur'ān and (or) about narratives from the Jewish and Christian communities—especially Believers who were themselves of Jewish or Christian origin.⁴ The Umayyads, however, may also have contributed to the impetus to gather such materials.

The early community of Believers was not engaged in debates only with non-Muslims during the first century AH. Debates arose also within the community of Believers itself, and some of these precipitated themes of historiographical activity. The rivalries for leadership of the community that broke out in the open fighting of the First and Second Civil Wars gave rise to numerous accounts of the theme of *fitna*, the concern of which was to report specific events relating to one or another aspirant's or party's claims to communal leadership, and thereby to bolster those claims. This theme was most assiduously cultivated by (and may have begun among) the supporters of 'Alī and his family, particularly in al-Kūfa, since it was their belief that the Umayyads had deprived the 'Alids unjustly of leadership, through mere force and guile; however, other parties (including the Khawārij, the Zubayrids, and the Umayyads themselves) also cultivated *fitna* accounts, if for no

⁴Whether they themselves could have remained Jewish or Christian and simultaneously been considered Believers depends on how fully the symbiosis spoken of in the preceding paragraph was operative, which was probably a function of date (presumably tending to greater symbiosis the earlier in the Islamic era one goes).

other reason than to respond in kind to allegations directed against them and favoring their rivals. The theme of pre-Islamic Arabia also emerged, as we have seen, as a response to rivalries among different groups of Believers/Muslims.

Believers seem first to have collected accounts relating to these themes—Qur'ān-related narratives, pre-Islamic Arabic, *nubūwa*, *umma*, *futūḥ*, *fitna*—during the final third of the first century AH (the first two mentioned may have begun as early as the middle of the first century). They based the accounts on 1) whatever they remembered personally; 2) what others had told them on the basis of their personal recollections, 3) documents, letters, poems, genealogical notes, etc., and, where relevant 4) writings from outside the Muslim community (e.g. on the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān). (The first two—1 and 2)—are, of course, essentially the brief accounts described as circulating in the Pre-Historicist Phase.) The first generation of transmitters (such as Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab and other informants of al-Zuhārī for *nubūwa* accounts) synthesized these materials into fairly coherent stories related to particular themes. These narratives were at first orally conveyed, sometimes with the help of written notes, but probably not yet cast into definitive written form as books.

Naturally the earliest episodes in the history of the community—Muḥammad's youth and life in Mecca, followed by his career in Medina—were the most difficult to recover remembered information about. Not only were these events farther back in time, meaning that by the late first century AH most people alive had been born too late to have any personal recollection of them at all; they had, as events, also affected fewer people than the events of later years, fewer even than Muḥammad's last years in Medina, when his activities would have made an impression on large numbers of people in western Arabia. For more recent events, on the other hand, such as the conquests and the civil wars, remembered material was much more plentifully available. Material not relevant to these early historiographical themes tended to be ignored as insignificant, and hence was lost with the passage of time. Some survives as scattered stray information, too little, usually, to be of much use for modern analysis; and there is some evidence of clusters of accounts that remained of marginal or local interest and were never taken up by the mainstream. But, by and large, the content of

the early historiographical tradition focuses rather tightly around the themes delineated above.

THE EARLY LITERATE PHASE (CA. 75 AH–CA. 150 AH)

During this phase the narratives that circulated, initially orally, during the Proto-Historicist Phase began to be set down in fixed written form(s). Some of these narratives were extended, unbroken accounts of considerable length, already the product of a synthesis of diverse kinds of material during the preceding phase; in the course of this process of synthesis, transmitters sometimes made efforts to harmonize conflicting stories or details. Other accounts took the form of short, independent accounts, or shorter episodes that fit into larger narratives or were critical comments related to episodes in such larger narratives. New material, reflecting the political, theological, social, and other issues of the day, was sometimes fabricated (within the constraints imposed by the received tradition) and put into circulation. Some secondary issues, such as concerns to establish the relative sequence or absolute chronology of events, were also introduced to the material. The themes of administration, *khilāfa*, and *sīrat al-khulafā'* probably began to crystallize at this time, drawing sometimes on earlier material. The first written collections of historical narratives were made during this period; some were doubtless little more than random assortments of accounts on various themes, but the first monographs devoted to specific historical themes also began to appear during this phase.

THE LATE LITERATE PHASE ("CLASSICAL ISLAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY," CA. 125 AH–CA. 300 AH)

During this phase the early narratives assembled during the preceding phase were collected (or re-collected) and sometimes reworked, even repeatedly reworked. This process of redaction included several kinds of operation. 1) Secondary concerns were worked into the material (for example: chronology, taxation and *ridḍa* issues overlaid on earlier *futūḥ* reports, etc.). 2) Accounts were edited, selected, or dropped according

to political, theological and social needs of the compilers and interests of the community. We can speculate, for example, that many accounts bolstering Umayyad and Zubayrid political legitimacy vanished during this phase, after the two families' claims to the caliphate in the east had become moot through their political defeats—the main operative factor here probably being that such material had become irrelevant to current political discussions and so was dropped, not that it was intentionally “suppressed” by the authorities.⁵ 3) Larger compilations (for example, the first universal histories and annalistic works) were compiled, using material from the earlier generation of monographs, which was frequently broken up and recombined according to the organizational scheme of the new, larger works. In this process, the *akhbār* format and the strict methodology of the study of *ḥadīth* made a strong impact.

These works, or their direct descendants, are those that have survived to our own day. They show two factors at work. On the one hand, the classical compilations undoubtedly reveal the shaping hand of the compiler in favoring certain themes over others, and sometimes in their partisan bias. In other words, these were not merely random collections of accounts, but collections in some measure consciously shaped in their presentation by the ideological views of their compilers/authors.⁶ On the other hand, the late compilations are not merely independent interpretations of the Islamic past constructed out of whole cloth by the compilers, as a novelist might shape his novel; they do contain material from the earlier phases of historical writing in the Islamic community, and this earlier writing was rather closely focused on a limited number of themes, and neglected other subjects. This fact imposed definite constraints upon the ability of the third-century AH and later compilers to shape the narrative of Islamic origins; the earlier stages of the historiographical tradition to some extent set the agenda for later compilers, or at least confronted them with themes that had to be dealt with, and imposed on them also serious gaps in information on subjects that had not been of interest to earlier Believers. Any effort to understand the

⁵Note that much material supporting the political claims of both the ‘Alids and the ‘Abbāsids is to be found in surviving tradition, precisely because the ‘Alid-‘Abbāsīd political rivalry was the main one in force at this time.

⁶See above, 125–27 and 137–38, and 126 n. 1.

classical compilations (such as al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*) solely as an exercise in free interpretation on the "author's" part is bound to encounter difficulty as long as it does not recognize the constraints imposed by earlier historiographical tradition. It is true that al-Ṭabarī and others interpreted their material and shaped it according to their own agendas, but they could only interpret what was available to them.

Some General Reflections on Early Islamic Historiography

Our study has shown that historical writing in the Islamic tradition first developed as one response to issues of legitimacy and identity that had arisen within the early community of Believers. It did not develop, as has sometimes been assumed, out of a supposed "idle curiosity" about the past, nor because the Believers feared they would lose all record of the Prophet's words and deeds as the remaining people who had actually known him died off; both of these sets of assumptions, it seems to me, beg the essential question of *why* the Believers should have been interested in the past in the first place. For, as we have seen, a coherent interest in the past is not a necessary or automatic human activity; it arises for specific reasons intrinsic to the historical situation in which a community lives. Moreover, as we have seen there is ample reason to think that the earliest Believers had little interest in historical narration (Chapter 2). We have argued, rather, that the development of an interest in the past and a desire to record it as history was integrally connected with the early Believers' developing conception of themselves as Muslims, and were one of the ways in which the Muslims sought to legitimize themselves as monotheists, as recipients of God's revealed word, and as rightful heirs to God's kingdom on earth. The historiographical themes that emerged as focal points for this interest in the past were thus decidedly functional within the context of the Muslims' struggle to define themselves as a community distinct from other monotheists; in addition, there emerged themes reflecting the struggle by various groups within the community to legitimize their own claims to leadership. What was not functional in such terms was irrelevant, and hence ignored;⁷

⁷To put it another way, no historiographical themes evolved around what was not functional.

and the information in the tradition must be understood in light of the themes into which it is cast, and the communal issues that generated the themes. Recognition of the existence of these themes and issues thus enhances our ability to assess the historicity ("truth") of the accounts we read; indeed, it is absolutely necessary to make such an assessment.

The adherents of what we have termed the "skeptical school," as seen in the Introduction, have argued that in the corpus of accounts about Islamic origins we have only the "rubble" of early debates that have been so pulverized by the impact of later issues and by tendentious reworking that we cannot know the oldest issues that exercised the community's attention. At that time we explored some of the *general* weaknesses that inhere in the approach of the "skeptical school;" let us now examine more closely this notion of "rubble," and test its assumption that there once existed an earlier, coherent, and now completely obliterated set of issues or debates that is beyond historical recovery.

First, we must note that it is by its very nature an argument from silence that posits a conspiracy for which no direct evidence exists, other than the perceived "opacity" or resistance to analysis of the tradition itself. We have already seen, however, that the idea of a conspiracy so widespread and, above all, so totally successful, is highly implausible, and that what appear to be traces of very early issues and information do, in fact, exist in the tradition.⁸

But what of the "opacity" argument—the idea that Islamic tradition on Islamic origins is so monolithic and seamless that effective analysis of it to discover the early truth of Islam's origins is impossible? The analysis offered in the preceding chapters suggests that the tradition is not, after all, so "opaque." To be sure, the accounts about the Prophet Muḥammad, the early Islamic conquests, the First Civil War, and the

⁸See above, 25–29. E.g. Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 15, which notes that the evidence for Islamic origins "bear[s] all the marks of having been through the mill of rabbinic arguments and subsequently tidied up," but never says by whom; or Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 21–28, which speaks of Samaritanism as providing Islam's model for sanctuary traditions and political authority, without saying who could have implemented this infusion of Samaritan concepts in a community that extended from Egypt to Iran.

early caliphate do display a kind of uniform view of the community of Believers as being united from the start around a conception of Islam that resembles the "classical Islam" of the second and third centuries AH. We might liken these accounts collectively to a mirror, in which the authors of the second and third centuries looked to see Islam's origins, but saw reflected mainly themselves—their own understandings of how those origins "must have been," based on the conditions and ideals of their own age.

But the silvering of this mirror is not perfect; in particular, the main themes of early Islamic historiography themselves provide us with a way to see through the mirror to what lies behind it. Some of these themes make it clear that, notwithstanding the dogmatic vision of the earliest Believers as forming a distinct community of Muslims, one of the key issues with which the early community of Believers wrestled was its own identity vis-à-vis other monotheist communities. This broad issue comprised a series of more specific sub-issues, among them: the nature and validity of Muḥammad's claim to be a prophet; closely related to this, the authenticity of the Qur'ān as divine revelation; the fluidity or sharpness of the boundary between the community of Believers and other monotheist confessions, particularly Christians and Jews; and the authority for Muslim rule over non-Muslim communities. This complex of issues, articulated in the themes of Prophecy, Community, and Hegemony, has been quite successfully screened from later scrutiny by surviving accounts. These unflinchingly try to interpret any evidence of an earlier phase, in which the community of Believers displayed a looser confessional identity, in accordance with the silvering on the mirror of later realities, when Muslims had finally defined themselves as a community absolutely distinct from Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. But an awareness of the importance of this issue of identity to the early community provides us with a clue of inestimable value in searching individual accounts for telltale residues of later redaction or reinterpretation. For example, the later tendency simply to treat the terms "Believers" and "Muslims" as being, from the outset, synonyms now becomes an issue to be examined much more carefully.

Another complex of issues that occupied the early community of Believers revolved around questions of leadership within the commu-

nity itself, enshrined especially in the themes of Leadership.⁹ Most of the issues in this complex were less successfully obscured by later tradition. It has long been recognized that the early Believers came to blows over these questions, particularly during the civil wars, when members of the Quraysh (and of other groups) fought each other openly; this painful chapter in the history of the Muslim community still glimmers through clearly, despite later efforts (in the Sunnī community, at least) to establish a dogma emphasizing the solidarity and unity of the early community and the moral perfection of all Companions of the Prophet. On the other hand, the rivalry between South Arabians and Quraysh for leadership of the community—reflected in the Yemeni materials in the theme of pre-Islamic Arabia and in accounts in Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād’s *Kitāb al-ḥitan*—was quietly dropped from the canonical narrative, the focus of which is decidedly the Quraysh “success story.” The later dogma that leadership of the Muslim community must come from the Quraysh is assumed for the early period too. The Yemenite (genealogical) and Khārijite (pietistic) challenges to the claims of Quraysh were not completely effaced and shine through the body of traditional material if one looks for them, but they are certainly played down by the tradition, with its overwhelming focus on the leadership of Quraysh.

The Question of Multiple Orthodoxies

The fact remains, however, that the historical and theological views of these different groups—particularly, their views on early Islamic history—do survive, albeit imperfectly. The Shī‘ī interpretation of early Islamic history, with its emphasis on the *fitna* theme as an articulation of the claims of ‘Alī and his kinsmen, developed as we have seen mainly during the first and second centuries AH, and is strongly recorded in a large number of readily available works. The Umayyads’ contribution to the *fitna* theme, dealing with their own legitimacy to rule, survives in at least truncated form; far more important, however, were their efforts to establish the foundations of communal identity by encouraging the collection of materials on the themes of *nubūwa* and *umma*,

⁹As noted above, we might also wish to see vestiges of an issue of Entitlement, concerned with divergent claims to access to resources (other than leadership itself)—military pay, grants of land, etc. See above, 144–45 and n. 41.

materials that formed the outlines of the “standard” biography of the Prophet Muḥammad himself. The Umayyads, as we have seen, also may have taken the lead in encouraging the collection of *futūḥ* narratives as a way of legitimizing the Muslims’ hegemony over non-Muslims. The early Khārijites, who come across in their own poetry and in others’ reports about them as zealous pietists, emphasized pious or moral legitimation and so were not particularly concerned with history, but their general views on the subject survive in somewhat later (second and third century) theological tracts and in explicitly historical sections of some even later works; as different as their *evaluation* of the events and their legitimist implications were, their view of the *course* of events does not differ greatly from that of the Umayyads or the Shī‘a. The “Sunni” or Murji‘ī historical view, which only arose during the second century, relied heavily on existing material on the Prophet Muḥammad (the *nubūwa* and *umma* themes), on *futūḥ* material, and on *fitna* material, the latter modified slightly by the ‘Abbāsids to bolster the legitimist claims of their own branch of the clan of Hāshim, at the expense of the ‘Alids. In sum, traces of all of these early historical visions—the Umayyad, ‘Alid, and Khārijite—are still visible today, at least in vestigial form, and in many cases in considerable force.

The existence of these historical reconstructions made by different sectarian groups—what we can term “multiple orthodoxies”—provides us with a way of confirming the outlines of early Islamic history familiar to us from the standard “Sunni” reconstruction. On the one hand, it is clear that the different reconstructions differ in many respects, reflecting each group’s attitudes on a number of key theological and political issues.

The disagreements are considerable in this instance, but we must note that they are, for the most part, disagreements over the interpretation or significance of particular events and actions, rather than disagreements over the actual events and actions themselves, about which there is surprising unanimity. All agree on the sequence of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī as the first four caliphs (whether legitimate or not), on the manner of succession of each, on the main events taking place during their reign. All agree that ‘Uthmān was murdered in office, that Mu‘āwiya and his family raised the banner of vengeance for the murdered caliph, that Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr fought

against 'Alī and died at the battle of the Camel near al-Baṣra, that Mu'āwīya and 'Alī faced one another in a military encounter at Ṣiffin (although they may be suspect on the outcome of the battle),¹⁰ that the two sides agreed to arbitrate their dispute (although they disagree on the results of the arbitration). Similarly, all confirm the general outlines of Muḥammad's career: revelation, first preaching in Mecca, persecution by Quraysh, emigration to Medina, struggle against the Quraysh (Badr, Uḥud, Trench, Ḥudaybiya) and internal consolidation in Medina (Jewish clans), the conquest of Mecca, etc. These interpretations reveal many differences in emphasis, and especially differences in the perceived moral legitimacy of various actors on the stage of early Islamic history, but surprising consensus on the actual course of events.

There are three possible ways to explain this consensus about the events of Islamic origins. One possible explanation, favored by radical revisionist historians of recent years, is to see it as the product of a process of myth-making in the Islamic community at a much later date. In this view, the story of Islamic origins was fabricated during the second and subsequent centuries AH as a way of explaining both the communal identity of Muslims and their internal divisions; the real events lying at the origins of Islam, whatever they may have been, were either completely forgotten, or have been completely suppressed and obscured by the later myth, and can never be satisfactorily recovered from the evidence available today. But, as we have seen in the Introduction, there is no evidence to support the idea that such a pervasive and effective conspiracy ever existed, and much that seems to contradict it. Moreover, there is too much evidence that the outlines of the consensus view existed too early—already by *ca.* 100 AH—to let us doubt the basic historicity of some of what is in that view; besides which, the identity of some of the early actors in the events have been, by good fortune, confirmed in documents.¹¹

¹⁰See Crone, *Slaves on Horses*, 203–203 n. 30, on a Syriac source, presumably reflecting otherwise lost Syrian (Umayyad) tradition, that omits 'Alī from the list of caliphs and presents Ṣiffin as a victory for Mu'āwīya.

¹¹It is noteworthy that documentation exists for some early figures (e.g. Mu'āwīya), but not for the earliest—Muḥammad and the first four caliphs, their main governors and generals, etc. However, the fact that the kind of material found in the traditional narratives about Mu'āwīya and his successors appears

A second way to explain the existence of this consensus in the face of the obvious political and doctrinal diversity of the Islamic tradition would be to argue that the consensus represents a fiction that arose *before* the coalescence of the Islamic historiographical tradition and the diverse political and theological points of view it embraces. By this argument, the common features shared by the “multiple orthodoxies” can be explained away as simply the residue of the spurious origins story from which they all diverged. However, this scenario, like the preceding one, fails to tell us who could have had the authority and power to impose a spurious narrative of this kind on the community of Believers, and under what circumstances. Moreover, the chronology of such a scenario is plagued by grave problems. If the basic outlines of the extant narratives of Islamic origins are a dogmatic fiction that was established before the beginnings of the historiographical tradition, we would have to place the crystallization of that fiction no later than about 75 AH.¹² In 75 AH, however, there were still many people alive who could remember clearly the events of the 30s AH (First Civil War), ‘teens and twenties AH (ridda and conquests), and perhaps even the first decade of the *hijra* era (Muḥammad in Medina). Any “dogmatic” view that crystallized so early would have had to withstand the scrutiny of people who remembered those events as participants in them. If the “dogmatic” view had been markedly at variance with what they remembered, one would expect to find strongly divergent opinions expressed, some of which would inevitably have survived. Yet, as we have seen, the diversity of the extant material revolves around interpreting the moral meaning and political significance of various events, not around the main events themselves, which seem to receive universal assent.

to be quite consistent in form and content with that about Mu‘āwiya’s predecessors offers some grounds for to giving the earlier material also the benefit of the doubt.

¹²Indeed, there is documentary evidence (a papyrus) showing that by the later first century AH, even such an early event in the history of the community as the battle of Badr (traditionally dated to 2 AH) was being recalled in terms resembling those in which it appears in the developed historiography of the second and third centuries AH. See Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, 82–84. Crone’s critique of this in *Meccan Trade*, 226–29, affects only the chronology, which we would expect in any case to be uncertain (see Chapter 10 above).

The third possible way to explain the consensus is much simpler and, I believe, more plausible: it is to assume that the consensus exists because events actually did happen in the way described by our sources, and were so well known in the early community that all groups were required to accept the basic "script" of events. To do otherwise would have exposed them to ridicule. It was for this reason that various informants—whatever their political and theological predilections—describe basically the same course of events, even though each may try to bring a distinctive interpretation to bear on them. By the early second century AH, this basic narrative of Islamic origins was firmly enough established that later generations were tightly constrained by it. A polemicist of the mid-second century AH, faced with a fairly extensive set of existing accounts about an event such as the battle of Badr or the murder of the caliph 'Uthmān, could only fabricate material that did not diverge too blatantly from the commonly accepted general outlines of "what happened." In general, this meant that such fabrication could only be exercised on certain parts of the story, whereas others simply had to be accepted, or that details and anecdotes could be added only to the extent that they did not alter the basic structure of the story.¹³ The only central part of what becomes the Islamic origins story that was beyond the control of the memory of individual Muslims was, it seems, the Prophet's early life in Mecca, and as many have observed, it was in this chapter of the origins story that legendary material struck its deepest roots.¹⁴

Serious distortions could, of course, still result. A transmitter could make subtle changes in emphasis in a given account that might shift the apparent motivation for someone's action; distortion by omission of crucial details was common; historicization—the fabrication of material (whether additional details or whole episodes) to be embroidered into the framework of a known event—could similarly introduce an apparently new dimension to the account.¹⁵ But the conservative effect of the tradition as a whole imposed restraints on the kind and degree of distortion. Distortions or forgeries made without carefully heeding

¹³See the comments above, 210–12, on the principle of "verisimilitude in counterfeiting."

¹⁴See above, 204–205.

¹⁵On historicization, see above, 209–14.

the limits established by received tradition would have been “too artificial for an alert audience, and hence self-defeating.”¹⁶ The consensus that exists among the “multiple orthodoxies”, in other words, can most plausibly be taken as confirmation of the general course of events long familiar to us from the Islamic tradition.

However comforting this fact may be for the modern historian, however, it does not help us to evaluate the single, isolated account; in such cases, there is no way to be sure which aspects of an account might represent the “consensus” of the tradition’s view, and which the fabrications and distortions. Rather, it becomes necessary to compare an account with as many others on the same subject as possible, in an effort to gain a glimpse of the growth of the collective tradition on that subject over time. This is, of course, the time-tested approach of tradition and redaction criticism. Not by rejecting the whole Islamic tradition as “opaque,” but rather by patiently unraveling the strands and layers of the complex of traditional material, will the Islamic origins story finally come, at least partially, to light.

¹⁶Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory*, 131–32. Lassner provides a superb example of such constraints imposed by the historiographical tradition on ‘Abbāsīd propagandists of the late second century AH, and the changes in emphasis they introduced to serve their political purposes.

EPILOGUE

WHAT BECAME OF THE CLASSICAL HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION?

THE PRECEDING PAGES have attempted to show that classical Islamic historiography was the product of specific needs that arose during the growth of the community of Believers—particularly the need to define itself as a community of Muslims distinct from other monotheisms, the need to justify its claim to religious and temporal superiority, and the need to adjudicate internal disputes over political and religious leadership within the community.

The classical “salvation history” or “story line” continued to be preserved, but ceased to be actively worked and reworked after about the fourth century AH (eleventh century CE), because 1) to the extent that the issues that had generated the historiographical themes that dominate early Islamic history remained relevant, a suitable position was already present in existing works, such as al-Ṭabarī’s compilation; and 2) because to a large extent the community outgrew, through natural historical change and evolution, the issues that were enshrined in the classical historiographical tradition.

The result was two-fold. On the one hand, the classical “story line” was maintained, and retold, but in summarized form. (This process is analogous to the development of the sciences of *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* in the same period [fourth–sixth centuries AH]: the old preoccupation with the elaboration and analysis of *ḥadīth* itself, which had been the battleground on which social and political and religious issues had been

worked out in the community, slowly fades as “set” answers to many issues were established and hardened into dogma; and in its place, one increasingly finds merely summaries of the decisions reached by earlier scholars on the basis of *ḥadīth* analysis.) Many later texts—e.g. Ibn al-Athīr’s *Al-Kāmil fī l-ta’rīkh* or Mamluk-period universal histories—are content to begin with a longer or shorter summary of what al-Ṭabarī, for example, provides in his history.¹

On the other hand, the new needs faced by the community in areas of political and religious legitimation led to the creation of new canons of historical writing, since the classical historical tradition did not address the new concerns.² The decisive dissolution of a unified caliphate and proliferation of completely autonomous Islamic political entities, for example, or the vexed relationship between those claiming religious authority and those actually holding political power, contributed to a new, more locally defined, more secular, and less universal approach to historical writing. Local dynasties received their own histories; the values of pre-Islamic traditions of kingship enshrined in the old Iranian “mirror for princes” literature found their way more directly into these new historical works, at the expense, or at least beside, the earlier, more purely “Islamic” values of the classical historiographical tradition. The classical historiographical tradition had performed magnificently in providing Islam with a powerful historical justification for its universal religious and political claims, even helping profoundly to establish Islam’s very identity. But, by the fourth century AH, its work was largely complete; thereafter, it retired from active service, remaining available in summary form to remind Muslims of later generations where they came from and who they were. Although now a kind of museum piece, it stands even today as an enduring monument to the complex process by which Islam became one of the major forces in world history.

It is not entirely a museum piece, however, but still a living force in shaping human endeavor, in at least two—and two very different—ways. The first has to do with the way many Muslims, even today, view

¹Indeed, as Humphreys has noted (*Islamic History*, 72), even some relatively early texts, such as al-Ya’qūbī’s *Ta’rīkh*, must already be seen as digests of the material found in larger compilations, such as al-Ṭabarī’s.

²These later developments in Islamic historical writing are surveyed in Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*.

themselves. Many modern Muslims tend to see themselves and their community through the lens of the classical Islamic view of history. They do so when, for example, they defend, in terms of traditional concepts, Muḥammad's claim to prophecy, or when (as sometimes happens) they dismiss all that is pre-Islamic as mere *jāhiliyya* and therefore lacking in cultural value, or when (in some cases) they yearn for a return to the values of the "golden age" of the Prophet and his immediate Companions, that blessed time before *fitna* or secular temptation tore the fabric of the unified community of Believers.

But the classical Islamic view of history also lives on—i.e. shapes action—in another, very different way, and surprisingly enough, in another community, where one might not expect it: that of the West, particularly the Western academic community. Western students of Islam ("Orientalists"), some of whom in the nineteenth century first made a concerted effort to overcome centuries of Western hostility and popular bias against Islam, did so, to their credit, by turning to the Islamic sources themselves for information, rather than relying on polemical works about Islam and travelogues by Western scholars who had visited Islamic lands.³

Relying at first on relatively late Islamic sources, which provided in summary form the classical Islamic view of Islam's origins, Western scholars increasingly became aware of, and actively sought out, the earlier Islamic sources in an effort to penetrate to the historical truth of Islam's origins. There can be no question that these efforts, continued right until today, have resulted in a far more accurate historical understanding of Islam and its origins than was available in the West (or anywhere else) two centuries ago.

Being (for the most part) non-Muslims, Western scholars have been free to apply the full force of historical-critical analysis to the narratives of Islamic origins in their effort to secure what seemed, to them, the most plausible historical understanding of the rise and early development of Islam. In some ways, as we have seen, this analysis led to conclusions that challenged some basic aspects of the traditional Islamic view of history.⁴ But at the same time, and perhaps unwittingly,

³See above, 5.

⁴See the Introduction for a sketch of some of the main lines of this scholarship.

Western scholarship in large measure internalized certain aspects of the traditional Islamic view.

Foremost among them is the notion of the rise of Islam as a profound break in human history. While there can be no doubt that the rise of Islam does mark a turning-point in the history of the Near East and of much of the Old World, the tendency—inherited from the Islamic tradition's own origins narratives—to see this change as an abrupt one coming suddenly with the career of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Islamic conquests that followed on the heels of his preaching is one that is profoundly misleading, because it obscures (or tempts us to ignore) important historical continuities spanning the supposed “divide” between the Islamic and pre-Islamic “eras.” Most professional historians dealing with the Near East are, of course, aware that continuities existed across this “divide,” and some important work has even been done by Western historians to explore these continuities. Yet, the imprint of this old conceptualization still survives in many ways, suggesting that the sharp dichotomy “Jāhiliya/Islam” still holds powerful sway, if perhaps only subconsciously, in the minds of many Western scholars.

Its imprint is quite clear in the field of Near Eastern archaeology, for example; for more than a century (mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries), the usual practice has been that the ancient and Roman-Byzantine remains have been carefully excavated, labeled, stored, and analyzed; but during the same period, archaeological deposits from levels following the seventh century CE were routinely lumped together as “Arab” or “Islamic” with little or no further analysis, when they were not simply pushed aside and ignored (or, in the case of Luxor in the 1950s, summarily excavated and then bulldozed—over fifteen meters of them—into the Nile in order the more quickly to reach the Pharaonic deposits).⁵ Only in recent decades have some archaeologists

⁵The clearing process is described in Muhammad, “Preliminary Report on the Excavations Carried Out in the Temple of Luxor.” The frequent references to the “debris” that had to be cleared in order to uncover the Pharaonic remains barely indicates that this “debris” was the remains of Coptic/Byzantine and medieval Islamic Luxor; the description of the destruction process does not constitute even a cursory recording of what was found. Plates IVa, VII, and XXIV of this article give some idea of the height of the original mound that was cleared away; *Newsletter of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 69 (April, 1969),

begun to look closely at the Islamic strata, with a view to articulating both the complex developments within them, and the continuities that link them with the periods before 600 CE.⁶

The grip of this artificially deep dichotomy between pre-Islamic and Islamic is also immediately seen in the field of history. Most books surveying a broad sweep of the history of the Near East deal either with the Islamic era or with the pre-Islamic centuries; those that deal with both usually make a sharp division at *ca.* 600 CE, doing so in a manner that the powerful continuities that tied the sixth century to the seventh and eighth are obscured and little discussed. In the process, however, a truly historical understanding of the origins of Islam, as a religion and as a cultural synthesis, is rendered virtually impossible.

Finally, the grip of the traditional Islamic origins narratives is visible in institutional terms—particularly in the way programs of study of the Near East are structured. Most university programs in Near Eastern studies specialize in either the ancient (read pre-Islamic) Near East, or in the Islamic Near East—not in both; and those departments that cover both almost always organize their programs of study so that students do one or the other—bridging the “divide” has not been particularly frequent, nor has the structure of programs and their requirements encouraged it. This is, however, nothing more than an institutionalization, in Western universities and institutes, of the classical Islamic view of history, with its notion that Islam changed the

19, notes that when work started on the site “the old city of Luxor was seventeen meters high.” It goes on to note that “[t]he excavations of the Islamic period produced little of interest.” (I am grateful to Dr. Donald Whitcomb for these references.) One cannot argue that archaeological remains of “Islamic” levels are of less interest because they are not as old as the antique ones; seventh-century or tenth-century remains from Syria or Egypt, after all, are still many centuries older than most archaeological remains routinely given the most minute attention in pre-Columbian American, medieval European, and American colonial sites.

⁶Some early exceptions, of course, exist, notably Ernst Herzfeld and Jean Sauvaget—although the latter’s work might really be called historical topography, rather than archaeology, in that it involved no excavation. Starting in the 1960s, the exploration of Islamic archaeology and the archaeological strata linking the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods has been pioneered by a number of archaeologists, including Donald Whitcomb and Yoram Tsafrir, and by archaeologically minded art historians, such as Oleg Grabar.

world completely and owes nothing to pre-Islamic cultures. Such a division might be more understandable in universities in Islamic lands, where it could serve as part of the local culture's need to affirm its own cultural identity; to find it ingrained in the structure of Western university programs suggests the degree to which Western academicians have unconsciously embraced this aspect, at least, of the traditional Islamic view of history.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF EARLY TEXTS

THE FOLLOWING TABLE includes texts for which titles (or at least definite subjects) are known and that can be seen as belonging, directly or indirectly, to the field of historical writing. Early works of Qur'ān commentary (*tafsīr*) are included in the list, because some may have included accounts belonging to the themes Qur'ān-related narratives, *nubūwa*, and/or *umma*, and possibly to others. On the other hand, most works of purely theological concern—for example, those on Qur'ān reading—or on poetry are not included. Similarly, many works entitled simply *Ḥadīth* are omitted, even though many early ones may already have included *akhbār* that could be considered historical. The list includes for each work the name of the author, the death-date of the author, title of work, historiographical theme(s) to which the work relates, and source of information. The list includes only authors with death-dates up to the year 200 AH; this thus excludes most of the main *akhbārīs*, such as Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d. AH 204), Abū Ḥudhayfa (d. 206), al-Haytham ibn 'Adī (d. 206), al-Wāqidī (d. 207), Abū 'Ubayda (d. 210), al-Madā'inī (d. 235), etc. By the time these *akhbārīs* wrote, all of the themes identified below were well developed; for example, for Ibn al-Kalbī alone the *Fihrist* lists over one hundred titles of monographs on a wide variety of themes.

The following codes are used to signal historiographical themes treated by a work, when these can be proposed:

A = Pre-Islamic Arabia

CAd = Cult and Administration

Fi = *Fitna*

Fu = *Futūḥ*

I = Pre-Islamic Iran

K = *Khilāfa*

L = Local history

N = *Nubūwa*

Q = Qur'ān-related narratives

R = *Ridda*

S = *Sīrat al-khulafā'*

T = Books with title "*Ta'rikh...*," i.e. presumably annalistic or concerned with chronology and dating.

U = *Umma*

Determination of the historiographical themes treated by a work is usually based merely on what appears to be implied by the title; in the absence of reliable fragments of many of the works, one can hardly proceed otherwise. For many titles, no theme has been indicated; possible thematic associations are indicated with a question mark. When a text or a significant part of it survives, of course, such portions are considered in making the thematic determination.

The majority of the entries in the list are drawn from Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, I (*GAS* in the "Source" column), or from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* (*Fih*). Many items marked "*GAS*" are also found in the *Fihrist*; on the other hand, a notation of "*Fih*" means that the text mentioned is not listed in Sezgin. Since the authors and titles of the works listed can readily be located in either Sezgin or the *Fihrist* via their indexes, it was not felt necessary to include a specific page reference for each in the table.

In line with the comments made earlier (above, 145–46), it should be clear that this listing of titles is not meant to imply that each title actually represented a stable and fixed text that one could reconstruct verbatim from "quotes" by the author's students; many titles, particularly early ones, may represent not set texts but significant collections of notes on a given theme compiled by the "author," whose students may then convey information as different recensions of the original "book."

The possible lack of literary fixity of the text, however, should not affect the historiographical theme to which the text relates.

Entries are arranged by death-year of the author, when known. When there is disagreement on year of death, one has been chosen arbitrarily from those proposed by various authorities. No effort has been made to arrange several works by a single author in the chronological order they may have been produced in the author's life. In view of these facts, it should be clear that the list can only give a very approximate sense of the actual chronological order of the texts. However, even such an approximation is sufficient to offer a sense of the relative date of the emergence of particular historiographical themes.

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
'Ubayd Allāh ibn Sa'd al-Zuhrī	<i>Futūḥ Khālīd ibn al-Walīd</i>		Fu	<i>Fih</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	<i>Al-Silk al-nāzim fī akhbār al-awwal wa-l-ākhir</i>	34		<i>GAS</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	book on Adam and Eve	34	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	<i>Ḥadīth Dhū l-Kifl</i>	34	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	<i>Ḥadīth ḥamāmat al-dhahab</i>	34		<i>GAS</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	<i>Sīrat al-Iskandar</i>	34	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Ka'b al-Aḥbār	<i>Wafāt Mūsā</i>	34	Q	<i>GAS</i>
'Abd Allāh ibn Salām	<i>Al-Masā'il</i> (questions to Prophet)	43	Q	<i>GAS</i>
'Abd Allāh ibn Salām	magic and amulets	43		<i>GAS</i>
'Abd Allāh ibn Salām	traditions from Book of Daniel	43	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān	<i>K. al-mathālib</i> (on defects)	53		<i>GAS</i>
'Abīd ibn Sharya	<i>Al-Amthāl</i> (proverbs)	60?		<i>GAS</i>
'Abīd ibn Sharya	<i>Kitāb fī akhbār al-Yaman</i>	60?	A	<i>GAS</i>
'Abīd ibn Sharya	kings and traditions of peoples of past	60?	A?	<i>Fih</i>
Ṣuḥār al-'Abdī	<i>Amthāl</i> (proverbs)	50s?		<i>GAS</i>
Ṣuḥār al-'Abdī	<i>Nasab</i> (genealogy)	50s?		<i>GAS</i>
'Ilāqa ibn Kursum al-Kilābī	<i>Amthāl</i> (proverbs)	fl. 65?		<i>GAS</i>
Daghfal al-Shaybānī	<i>Al-Sīra 'an Daghfal</i>	65	A?	<i>GAS</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
Daghfal al-Shaybānī	<i>Al-Tashjīr</i> (genealogical "tree")	65	A	GAS
Ibn 'Abbās	<i>Ḥadīth al-mi'rāj</i>	69	N	GAS
Ibn 'Abbās	<i>Masā'il Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq</i> (glosses of Qur'ānic words?)	69		GAS
Ibn 'Abbās	<i>Musnad</i>	69		GAS
Ibn 'Abbās	ode on virtues of first four caliphs and his father al-'Abbās	69		GAS
Ibn 'Abbās	several works on Qur'ān reading, Qur'ān commentary, etc.	69		GAS
'Amr ibn al-Kawwā'	genealogy	80		GAS
Mathjūr ibn Ghaylān al-Ḍabbī	genealogy	85		GAS
Zayd ibn al-Kayyis al-Namarī	genealogy	80s?		GAS
'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr	<i>sīra</i> work	94	NU	GAS
'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr	<i>Ḥadīth</i>	94		GAS
Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab	<i>sīra</i> work, no <i>maghāzī</i>	94	N	GAS
Sa'īd ibn Jubayr	<i>Tafsīr</i>	95		GAS
'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ka'b	short <i>maghāzī</i> work	97	NU	GAS
Ābān ibn 'Uthmān	<i>maghāzī</i> work	100	NU	GAS
'Āmir al-Sha'bī	<i>Maghāzī</i>	103	NU	GAS
'Āmir al-Sha'bī	<i>K. al-shūrā wa-maqtal al-Ḥusayn</i>	103	Fi	GAS
'Āmir al-Sha'bī	book on conquests	103	FuN UA?	GAS GAS
'Āmir al-Sha'bī	several works on law	103		GAS
Mujāhid	<i>Tafsīr</i>	104		GAS
al-Ḍaḥḥāk	<i>Tafsīr</i>	105		GAS
al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr	biography of Prophet	107	NU	GAS
al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr	<i>maghāzī</i> book, with accounts of first three caliphs, battle of Camel, etc.	107	NU FuFi?	GAS
al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	110		GAS
al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	<i>Faḍā'il Makka</i>	110	A?L?	GAS
al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī	<i>Nuzūl al-Qur'ān</i>	110	N?	GAS

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
'Aṭīya ibn Sa'd	<i>Tafsīr</i>	111		<i>GAS</i>
'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāh	<i>Tafsīr</i>	114		<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Maghāzī</i>	114	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Ḥikmat Luqmān</i>	114		<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Ḥikmat Wahb</i>	114		<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Al-Mubtada'</i> [<i>wa-l-sīra?</i>]	114		<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Al-Mulūk al-mutawwaja min Himyar</i>	114	A	<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>K. Zabūr Dāwūd</i>	114	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Maw'iza (?)</i>	114		<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'</i>	114	Q	<i>GAS</i>
Wahb ibn Munabbih	<i>Risāla fī sīrat al-nabī</i>	114	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ka'b ibn Sulaym al-Qurazī	<i>tafsīr</i> with historical content?	118		<i>GAS</i>
Qatāda ibn Di'āma	<i>K. al-manāsik</i>	118	Cad?	<i>GAS</i>
Qatāda ibn Di'āma	<i>Tafsīr</i>	118		<i>GAS</i>
Qatāda ibn Di'āma	<i>Al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh</i>	118		<i>GAS</i>
'Abd Allāh ibn 'Āmir	<i>Qur'ān</i> reading	118		<i>GAS</i>
'Abd Allāh ibn Kathīr	<i>Qur'ān</i> reading	120		<i>GAS</i>
'Āṣim ibn 'Umar ibn Qatāda	<i>maghāzī</i> work	120	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
'Āṣim ibn 'Umar ibn Qatāda	<i>Manāqib al-ṣaḥāba</i>	120	U?	<i>GAS</i>
'Āmir ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Misma'i	work on Bakr and Taghlib wars	120	A	<i>GAS</i>
Muqātil al-Aḥwal	monograph on death of Kulayb	120	A	<i>GAS</i>
Zayd ibn 'Alī (probably later)	<i>Tafsīr</i>	122		<i>GAS</i>
Shuraḥbīl ibn Sa'id	<i>maghāzī</i> work	123	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Maghāzī</i>	124	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Nasab Quraysh</i>	124	A	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Asnān al-khulafā'</i>	124	KS	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Mashāhid al-nabī</i>	124	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Tanzīl al-Qur'ān</i>	124		<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>Al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh fī l-Qur'ān</i>	124		<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī	<i>ḥadīth</i> work	124	N?	<i>GAS</i>
'Aṭā' ibn Dīnār	<i>Tafsīr</i>	126		<i>GAS</i>
'Āṣim ibn al-Najjūd	<i>ḥadīth</i> work?	127		<i>GAS</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
Abū Ishāq ‘Amr al-Sabī‘ī	<i>maghāzī</i> work	127	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Ishāq ‘Amr al-Sabī‘ī	<i>futūḥ</i> work	127	F	<i>GAS</i>
Ismā‘īl al-Suddī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	128		<i>GAS</i>
Abū Qabīl Ḥuyayy ibn Hānī’	<i>K. futūḥ Miṣr</i>	128	FuL	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. al-faḍā’il</i>	128		<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. al-jamal</i>	128	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. al-nawādhir</i>	128		<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. maqṭal al-Ḥuṣayn</i>	128	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. maqṭal. . . ‘Alī</i>	128	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. Nahrawān</i>	128	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>K. Ṣiffīn</i>	128	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Jābir al-Ju‘fī	<i>Tafsīr?</i>	128		<i>GAS</i>
Ya‘qūb ibn ‘Utba	<i>sīra</i> , no <i>maghāzī</i>	128	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb	history of Egypt	128	L	<i>GAS</i>
‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Bakr al-Madanī	<i>maghāzī</i> work	130	NU	<i>GAS</i>
al-Ḥārith ibn Yazīd al-Ḥaḍramī	historical work on Egypt	130	L	<i>GAS</i>
Yazīd ibn Rūmān	<i>ḥadīth</i> collection?	130	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Yazīd ibn Rūmān	<i>maghāzī</i> work	130	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Aswad al-Asadī	<i>ḥadīth</i> collection?	131	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Aswad al-Asadī	<i>maghāzī</i> work	131	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
‘Aṭā’ al-Khurāsānī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	135		<i>GAS</i>
‘Aṭā’ al-Khurāsānī	<i>Al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh</i>	135		<i>GAS</i>
‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Abī Ja‘far al-Miṣrī	historical work on Egypt	135	L	<i>GAS</i>
Dāwūd ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Umawī	<i>sīra</i> work	135	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
al-Rabī‘ ibn Anas al-Bakrī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	139		<i>GAS</i>
Mūsā ibn ‘Uqba	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	141	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Mu‘tamir	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	143	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Ibn al-Muqaffa’	<i>Ā’in-nāmag</i>	144	CAdI	<i>Fih</i>
Ibn al-Muqaffa’	<i>K. al-tāj</i>	144	CAdI?	<i>Fih</i>
Ibn al-Muqaffa’	<i>Khwadāy-nāmag</i>	144	CAdI?	<i>Fih</i>
Ibn al-Muqaffa’	<i>Mazdak</i>	144	I	<i>Fih</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	146		<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī	works of genealogy, history	146		<i>GAS</i>
'Amr ibn al-Ḥārith al-Anṣārī	historical book on Egypt	147	L	<i>GAS</i>
'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam	<i>K. al-ta'rikh</i>	147	T	<i>GAS</i>
'Awāna ibn al-Ḥakam	<i>K. sirat Mu'āwiya wa-banī Umayya</i>	147	S	<i>GAS</i>
Shibl ibn 'Ubād al-Makkī	<i>Tafsīr</i>	148		<i>GAS</i>
Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān	<i>Tafsīr</i>	150		<i>GAS</i>
Muqātil ibn Sulaymān	<i>Tafsīr</i>	150		<i>GAS</i>
Muqātil ibn Sulaymān	<i>Al-Radd 'alā l-qadarīya</i>	150		<i>GAS</i>
Muqātil ibn Sulaymān	Qur'ānic readings, etc.	150		<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ishāq	<i>Akhbār Kulayb wa-Jas-sās</i>	150	A	<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ishāq	<i>K. al-futūḥ</i>	150	Fu	<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ishāq	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	150	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ishāq	<i>K. ḥurrāb al-Basūs bayna Bakr wa-Taghlib</i>	150	A	<i>GAS</i>
Muḥammad ibn Ishāq	<i>Ta'rikh al-khulafā'</i>	150	KST	<i>GAS</i>
Ma'mar ibn Rāshid	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	154	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Ma'mar ibn Rāshid	<i>Al-Jāmi' (ḥadīth collection)</i>	154		<i>GAS</i>
Ma'mar ibn Rāshid	<i>Tafsīr</i>	154		<i>GAS</i>
Ḥammād al-Rāwīya	historical book on the Jāhiliya	155	A	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Ahl Nahrwān wa-l-khawārij</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Al-Daḥḥāk al-khārījī</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Al-Ḥārith ibn Rāshid wa-banū Nājiya</i>	157		<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Al-Jamājim and elimination of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ash'ath</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Al-Mustawrid ibn 'Ullafa</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Bilāl al-khārījī</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Futūḥ al-'Irāq</i>	157	FuL?	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Futūḥ al-Shām</i>	157	FuL?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-akhbār</i> (about Companions of Prophet?)	157		<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-ghārāt</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-jamal</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-mu'ammārīn</i>	157		<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-ridda</i>	157	R	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. al-shūrā wa-maqtal</i> <i>'Uthmān</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. Şifṭīn</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Khālīd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Qaṣrī, Yūsuf ibn 'Umar, etc.	157	SKFi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>K. khabar al-Mukhtār</i> <i>wa-Ibn Ziyād</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal 'Alī</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal Ḥujr ibn 'Adī</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal al-Ḥusayn</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal Ibn al-Zubayr</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal Muḥammad ibn</i> <i>Abī Bakr, al-Ashtar,</i> <i>Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥu-</i> <i>dhayfa</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	death of Mu'āwiya, reign of Yazīd, bat- tle of al-Ḥarra, Ibn al- Zubayr's fortifications	157	FiKS	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Maqtal Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Marj Rāhiṭ, election of Marwān, death of al- Daḥḥāk ibn Qays	157	FiKS	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr in Iraq	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Muṭarrif ibn al-Mughīra	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Najda and Abū Fudayk	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	<i>Risāla</i>	157		<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaḥ	Shabīb al-Ḥarūrī and Şālih ibn Musarraḥ	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Sīrat al-Ḥusayn</i>	157	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Akhbār al-azāriqa</i>	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	<i>Akhbār Rustuqbādh</i>	157		<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad and 'Ayn Warda	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	Yā Ḥumayrā' and death of al-Ash'ath	157	Fi	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	Yaḥya ibn Zayd	157		<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab and his death	157		<i>Fih</i>
Abū Mikhnaf	Zayd ibn 'Alī	157		<i>Fih</i>
'Amr ibn Shamir	historical work on Ṣiffīn, other topics?	160	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥunayfī	<i>Sīra</i>	162	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Yaḥyā ibn Ayyūb	book on history of Egypt?	168	L	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Naḍr Jarīr ibn Ḥāzim	<i>K. al-azāriqa</i>	170	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Ma'shar Najīḥ	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	170	NU	<i>GAS</i>
Abū Ma'shar Najīḥ	<i>Ta'rīkh al-khulafā'</i>	170	TKS	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Yaqẓān	genealogy and history of Khindif	170	A	<i>Fih</i>
Abū l-Yaqẓān	history of Tamīm	170	A	<i>Fih</i>
Abū l-Yaqẓān	<i>K. al-nasab al-kabīr</i>	170	A	<i>Fih</i>
Khālīd ibn Ṭalīq	<i>K. al-burhān</i>	175?	A?	<i>GAS</i>
Khālīd ibn Ṭalīq	<i>K. al-ma'āthir</i>	175?	A?	<i>GAS</i>
Khālīd ibn Ṭalīq	<i>K. al-munāfarāt</i>	175?	A?	<i>GAS</i>
Khālīd ibn Ṭalīq	<i>K. al-mutazawwijāt</i>	175?	A?	<i>GAS</i>
'Abd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad al-Qāḍī	<i>maghāzī</i> book	176	NU	<i>GAS</i>
'Umar ibn Sa'd	historical work on Ṣiffīn, other topics?	180?	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
'Uthmān ibn Sāj	historical work on Mecca?	180?	L?	<i>GAS</i>
al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn 'Uthmān	historical works?	180		<i>GAS</i>
'Alī ibn Mujāhid	<i>K. akhbār al-umawīyīn</i>	182	KS	<i>GAS</i>
'Alī ibn Mujāhid	<i>K. al-maghāzī</i>	182	NU	<i>GAS</i>
al-Mu'āfā ibn 'Imrān	<i>Ta'rīkh al-Mawṣil</i>	184	L	<i>GAS</i>
'Umar ibn Muṭarrif	glorious deeds of Arabs	186	A	<i>Fih</i>

AUTHOR	TITLE (OR SUBJECT)	YEAR	THEMES	SOURCE
'Umar ibn Muṭarrif	habitations and migrations of Arabs	186	A	<i>Fih</i>
Abū Ismā'il al-Azdī al-Baṣrī	<i>Ta'riḫ futūḥ al-Shām</i>	187?	Fu	<i>GAS</i>
Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Fazārī	<i>K. al-siyar fī l-akhbār</i>	188?		<i>GAS</i>
Ibn Zabāla	historical book on Medina	190?	L	<i>GAS</i>
Laqīṭ al-Muḥāribī	<i>K. akhbār al-jinn</i>	190		<i>GAS</i>
Laqīṭ al-Muḥāribī	<i>K. al-ḥurrāb wa-l-luṣūṣ</i>	190	A?	<i>GAS</i>
Laqīṭ al-Muḥāribī	<i>K. al-nisā'</i>	190		<i>GAS</i>
Laqīṭ al-Muḥāribī	<i>K. al-samar</i>	190		<i>GAS</i>
Sayf ibn 'Umar	<i>K. al-futūḥ</i>	190?	Fu	<i>GAS</i>
Sayf ibn 'Umar	<i>K. al-jamal wa-masīr 'Ā'isha wa-'Alī</i>	190?	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
Yahyā ibn Sa'īd al-Umawī	<i>Maghāzī</i>	194	NU	<i>GAS</i>
al-Walīd ibn Muslim	<i>Maghāzī</i>	195	NU	<i>GAS</i>
al-Walīd ibn Muslim	<i>K. al-sunan</i>	195		<i>GAS</i>
al-Walīd ibn Muslim	wrote 70 other books?	195		<i>GAS</i>
al-Qaddāḥ	<i>K. nasab al-anṣār</i>	199	A	<i>GAS</i>
Ābān al-Lāhiqī	life of Anushirwān	200	I	<i>Fih</i>
Ābān al-Lāhiqī	life of Ardashīr	200	I	<i>Fih</i>
Ābān al-Lāhiqī	version of Barlaam and Jehosaphat	200	I	<i>Fih</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. al-faḍā'il al-kabīr</i>	200		<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. al-rāyāt</i>	200		<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. faḍā'il al-anṣār</i>	200	A	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. ṣifat al-nabī</i>	200	NU?	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. nasab wuld Ismā'il</i>	200	A	<i>GAS</i>
Abū l-Bakhtārī	<i>K. Ṭasm wa-Jadīs</i>	200	A	<i>GAS</i>
Ishāq ibn Sulaymān al-Hāshimī	<i>K. al-ta'riḫ wa-l-siyar</i>	200?	T	<i>GAS</i>
al-Naḍr ibn Ḥadīd	<i>Akhbār 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr</i>	200	Fi	<i>GAS</i>
'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Nawfalī	<i>K. al-akhbār</i>	200?	SK?	<i>GAS</i>

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This bibliography includes only those items cited in the text or notes of the present work. It combines primary sources, including published documents, and secondary literature; the publication of many documentary sources with extensive commentary made separation of primary from secondary sources futile. Most works are listed alphabetically by author or editor; works of unknown authorship, or large collaborative works, are listed by title. In alphabetizing romanized Arabic names and titles, the definite article "al-" has been ignored. Arabic authors have been listed according to the most commonly used form of their name, rather than according to some rigid system: e.g. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is listed under "Aḥmad," whereas Muḥammad ibn Sa'd is listed under "Ibn Sa'd." The listing also includes all bibliographical abbreviations utilized in this Bibliography and elsewhere in this work.

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General Index

On conventions adopted for alphabetization, see the introductory note to the Bibliography. In addition to the usual entries for persons, places, concepts etc., this index includes names of authors (medieval and modern) mentioned in the text, but not those mentioned in the notes, unless they are the subject of discussion there.

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